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JOY AFTER SORROW.

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MY FIRST AND MY LAST LOVE.  
CITY AND SUBURB.  
ABOVE SUSPICION.  
JOY AFTER SORROW.

Charlotte Eliza Lawson (Cowan) Riddell

# JOY AFTER SORROW.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

'GEORGE GEITH,' 'TOO MUCH ALONE,' 'HOME, SWEET HOME,'

'THE EARL'S PROMISE,' ETC. ETC.

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# JOY AFTER SORROW.

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## CHAPTER I.

THERE was no prouder nor richer man in the length and breadth of Lancashire—county of ancient gentry and merchant princes—than John Zuriel, Esq., of Stor Court. His wealth was reputed to be boundless; his ancestors certainly were innumerable, and although it was currently reported and believed that Mr Zuriel's father had lived and died, so to speak, with a bag on his back, and that the owner of Stor Court himself had, in his juvenile days, awakened, with the well-known melody of 'old clo', the slumbering echoes of many a quiet Liverpool street: yet, now when his parent slept, if common rumour were to be credited, in the sack he had so long carried; and Mr Zuriel had forgotten not merely the strain above mentioned, but also the fact that he ever knew it—now, when in short he had made a fortune in business and retired from trade altogether, what did it signify how or where, or by what means, all the money he possessed, had been accumulated?

We have all read how even the greatest families arise, stand triumphant for a season, and then, to show the mutability of all earthly things, totter and fall; such rapid ascents and still more rapid reverses may be witnessed any day, but it rarely happens that, after a race has been burnt to cinders in the fire of adversity, it rises like the phoenix again from its ashes and soars aloft into the aristocratical circles of society,

with wings even stronger and brighter than it boasted in the remote days of its traditional splendour.

There were many evil-disposed persons who called Mr Zuriel an upstart, a parvenu, and other disparaging names too numerous to mention: but that gentleman himself and his admirers asserted that he was at length merely restored to his proper rank; that during the time when he and his father were reduced to the disagreeable necessity of earning an honest livelihood by trade, the family glory was passing under a cloud (a golden one it turned out to be), from which it had now emerged, and shone brilliantly in the beautifying beams of the sun of prosperity.

Mr Zuriel stated, and for aught the chronicler of this history knows to the contrary, implicitly believed that the first of his ancestors of whom he had any accurate information, was among the Israelites led by Moses forth from Egyptian bondage.

Further than this, he usually confessed himself unable to go; but it is to be hoped, that what satisfied him may also prove satisfactory to the reader, so that no genealogical lamp will require to be lighted, in order to trace back the dim history of the Zuriels, even unto him from whom all the various races who people this earth are descended.

The pedigree of the possessor of Stor Court might not indeed have seemed quite clear to the imperfect vision of common observers, but to him the whole thing was as plain as the sun when it shone at noon-day in midsummer. He said, 'he could see his ancestors at a glance'—he had formed a mental picture of them—a sort of single file procession of the Zuriels from the time of Moses down to the beginning of the nineteenth century, commencing with his first-known progenitor, who was a pilgrim, occasionally dwelling in a tent, and finishing off with himself, who lived in great state at Stor Court; there was just one little vacant place in the whole, which blank ought to have been filled with the image of his worthy parent carrying a bag; but John Zuriel, Esquire, did not consider this figure true to life, and so contented himself with frequently reviewing the rest of his mighty army of Israelitish ancestors.

After Zuriel senior shuffled off this mortal coil, Zuriel junior shuffled off his parent's religion, and became what men

frequently do when they desert the faith of their youth, not because they have discovered something better, but because they are tired of it—a nothing in particular.

No one was ever able to find out what especial path he believed most likely ultimately to conduct an individual to Heaven; no one was ever clever enough to trap him into a theological discussion concerning the respective merits of the faith of Jew and Gentile; no one ever contrived to learn from his lips the words of the creed on which he considered his salvation depended.

He never explained his peculiar opinions to mortal ear; let us hope he whispered them to Heaven; he forsook Judaism but joined no one of the numerous sects into which the Church is divided. A man's religion is a subject that lies too deep for human vision accurately to determine where and in what form it dwells within his soul: let us charitably trust he was possessed of some faith capable of comforting him here, and benefiting him hereafter, and dismiss a theme which has been merely touched upon, to explain how it came to pass, that he, a lineal descendant of the ancient Israelites, wedded in the church of St Peter, situate, as everybody knows, in the thoroughfare called, because of its close proximity to the sacred edifice, Church Street, a fair-haired, blue-eyed, meek-faced, Gentile.

Yes, he—John Zuriel—there took to wife, Dorothea Rodgers; he vowed to love and cherish her and endow her with all his worldly goods, and by way of proving how very binding he considered this oath on his conscience, he made her as bad a husband as ever broke a gentle woman's heart, and for many years almost denied her the mere necessaries of existence.

Time went on—how the world prospered with the representative of the patriarchs no one inquired, until after years of toiling, scraping, and pinching, of putting shilling to shilling, pound to pound, hundred to hundred, thousand to thousand, John Zuriel, at length, by the aid of long hoarding and indefatigable industry, and one or two successful speculations, shot up at once into eminence and observation; was stated to be a millionaire retired from business; purchased Stor Court, and became a man of weight and note in the county mentioned in the beginning of this narrative, who had leisure and inclination to renew his formerly interrupted acquaintance with his pro-

genitors, or perhaps, indeed, to make acquaintance with them for the first time, and to discover from which great Jewish family he was sprung.

The new proprietor of Stor Court spared no expense in embellishing the house and grounds, the sum paid merely to Mr Smith, the eminent upholsterer, for furnishing and decorating the former, would, it was currently reported, have portioned a daughter handsomely.

People rushed from far and near to view the splendours of the place; they passed from room to room dazzled and bewildered by the magnificence which surrounded, amazed, and almost oppressed them.

When the young Earl of Faberleigh, who married a nabob's widow, and spent any amount of rupees in rendering his abode a sort of terrestrial paradise, saw 'Zuriel's Palace,' as the place was commonly called, he muttered in a confidential aside to his friend Sir Hugh Turner, of sporting celebrity :

'D—— the fellow, he has beaten me hollow,' to which remark the baronet gloomily and profanely assented.

In truth Stor Court was held to be an eighth wonder of the world; it was perfect. Dukes, Earls, Lords, Barons, and Baronets, might as frequently be met at Mr Zuriel's table as squires at the hospitable boards of humbler individuals. Grandees came, ate off silver, were regaled with foreign delicacies and expensive wines, stared at the heavy draperies and lofty mirrors, and articles of *vertú*, and costly paintings, and went away to cut up their host, and marvel where on earth the man had found a gold mine, and to confound his impudence in presuming to be their equal.

His pale wife was clad in velvet and adorned with jewels. On one occasion a prince of the blood honoured Stor Court with his presence, when a *fête* was given excelling in magnificence all that had been previously imagined or heard of in England, or read of in any book, always excepting the Arabian Nights. He paid an enormous sum yearly for the education of his only child—a daughter. To condense all into one sentence, there was not, as has already been stated, in the length and breadth of Lancashire, a prouder or a richer man than John Zuriel.

Increase of wealth brought, however, no increase of happi-



ness to the millionaire's wife. There are some griefs which money, all-powerful as it generally proves, cannot soothe: there are wounds which gold cannot heal: there are troubles which it is impotent to remove: it was rumoured that Mrs Zuriel was dying; and for once rumour was correct in her statement: eminent physicians were called in; consulted together; prescribed for the lady; pocketed their fees; gave the malady an imposing Latin name, and departed.

It proved a disease which it was beyond their skill to cure; it lay too deep for human eye to behold, for human hand to touch; it was simply, when stripped of the grand appellation bestowed on it by the men of medicine, the old homely malady of a broken heart.

The process of decay was so quiet, so gradual, that it could scarcely be noted even by those constantly in attendance upon her. The mistress of that stately mansion was dying—fading into the grave were a better phrase to use concerning so painless and almost imperceptible a decline; but some imagined she might linger for years, a pale, worn, melancholy invalid, who rarely now left her own apartment, and who was never seen by the guests who circled around her husband's hospitable board.

Visitors came and went—were cordially greeted—liberally entertained—and finally departed, full of admiration at the magnificence of a house, in one corner of which a gentle woman was waiting to die.

Waiting, weary of life; weary of sorrow, weary of the very splendour which surrounded her, till the welcome angel of death should summon her tired spirit from amidst the pomps and vanities and nothingnesses of existence, to find rest and peace at last.

She was as much dead to society and to the minds of most people as though she had been lying in her quiet grave, instead of reposing in her lonely chamber. She had her own especial servants, who ministered carefully to her wants—when her child came home from the select boarding-school, where she and a limited number of other young ladies were taught geography sitting in *fauteuils*; driven to church, and learnt religion as they did their lessons in the most fashionable and comfortable style,—when Selina, I say, came home for an occasional holiday, from the place where some hundreds per annum were

lashed for no adequate result, the little thing spent most of her time in the room where her mother was dying.

It was a touching sight to see them sitting thus quietly together—the parent's hand resting fondly and sadly amid the bright locks of her only darling—the daughter looking with solemn wondering eyes into the meek face of her who was soon to be an angel in heaven.

Once only did the door of that apartment open to admit a stranger—once, when Selina Zuriel was permitted to ask a favourite school-fellow, some years her senior, to spend a day, a whole day, contemplating the glories of Stor Court.

A handsome phaeton was despatched to convey them to that far-famed mansion—obsequious footmen attended the children—spirited horses scarcely seemed to touch the ground, so swiftly did they traverse the smooth turnpike roads—the very winds of heaven appeared to fan their temples gently—the park gates opened wide at their approach—servants were ready to fly at their slightest command—and finally, after the millionaire's daughter had conducted her visitor through lovely gardens and fine conservatories, and shown her rare flowers, and given her luscious fruits, and led her through suites of rooms, each one of which Frances Enstridge thought grander and more dazzling than its predecessor: after the child had led her along corridors, up staircases, across drawing-rooms, in the rich carpeting of which the young light feet sunk down and made no sound; after they had gazed at themselves in mirrors, noted costly paintings, wonderful vases, rare statuary, and seen all the fairy chambers of 'Zuriel's Palace,' a maid appeared to summon them to the closet where the skeleton, the only sad object in the house, was lying.

Selina was amazed at the mandate: but without delay she obeyed, and taking her friend's hand in hers, she led her with something of the same feeling with which she might have taken her into a solemn old-fashioned church, to her mother's chamber.

They crossed halls paved with marble; stole quietly up wide staircases, easy and pleasant of ascent; went whispering through apparently interminable galleries, and at length paused by the door of an apartment far removed from that portion of the house where guests were received and revelry was held.

Miss Enstridge hesitated for a moment as if fearful of in-

truding, but Selina pulled her into the room, and led her up to a sofa placed near a pleasant window, on which lay a thin emaciated being, who held out a wasted hand to the visitor and welcomed her kindly.

The girl looked around at the place and its occupant ; there are sights and contrasts which strike even the most thoughtless, and force them to reflect ; but Frances Enstridge had, in addition to plenty of observation, a somewhat matured understanding, and the two conjoined, compelled a mental comparison betwixt the mansion and the mistress thereof—between the state, the pomp, and luxury which pervaded the entire place, and the poor stricken invalid, for whom all the wealth of Peru, or splendour of the Indies, could not purchase one hour of health—one moment of enjoyment.

For a little while Mrs Zuriel talked pleasantly enough, though in a weak tremulous voice, to the two girls : asked of their studies, their favourite pursuits ; spoke to both in fact as she always conversed with her little Selina ; but at last she said she was tired, and bade them go and amuse themselves in whatever manner best suited their inclinations.

As Frances Enstridge, however, approached to say farewell, the dying lady drew her closer towards the couch, and said,

‘ There was a time, my dear, when your mamma knew me in very different circumstances—when no one could have expected that I should ever come to live—to die in a house like this. She was very kind to me then ; tell her when next you see her, that I have never forgotten her, that her name has often passed my lips in fervent prayer for her happiness. I—I sent for you to say this to you, and ask you to accept a little remembrance of me, which you will please to keep when I am gone ; and tell your mamma that Mrs Zuriel earnestly trusts that God may bless her, and bless her children. There, my dear, that is all I have to say. Good-bye—I hope you and Selina will always be steady friends to one another. Good-bye.’

She wound her arm around the girl’s neck and kissed her, whilst tears dimmed her once bright eyes. God only knew how much of bitterness, of sickening grief, of old sorrow, had passed through her, as she uttered the above sentence, and placed a costly diamond ring on Frances’ finger. He who was about to take the tired spirit unto Himself, was cognizant of the whole

sad history—a history which no poverty could make darker, no advantages of position or wealth, even a degree brighter; the story was the same throughout—it was the same mournful melody played on a gloomy winter's evening and a bright summer's noon—the circumstances under which it was heard were different, but the strain itself was still the same, and seemed perhaps all the sadder because of the brilliancy of other surrounding sounds and objects.

‘The heart knoweth his own bitterness.’

Somehow, whenever in after life Frances Enstridge heard that text, the memory of a quiet chamber she once had entered recurred to her mind, and a pale wasted form was presented to her mental vision.

Slowly and silently the visitor and her little hostess passed forth from Mrs Zuriel's room—the joy was gone from their hearts; the gloom which lay around the dying lady and enveloped her as with a pall, had chased their mirth away, and filled their young breasts with strange unnatural sadness. The paintings seemed no longer beautiful; the mirrors had lost their brightness, the flowers their loveliness, the fruit its taste. The enchantment had vanished from about the place; it appeared large, comfortless, dreary—magnificent it might be still, but it was a kind of chilly magnificence, which froze the stranger's soul within her: she felt glad to get away to breathe the free air of heaven, to leave that fairy palace and the sad inmate—who ever after seemed, to Frances' imagination, alone to dwell in it—far behind her.

But her curiosity was excited concerning Mrs Zuriel's previous history; and in the course of a few months she had an opportunity of satisfying it.

‘Mamma,’ she said to her mother on her return home from school, ‘where did you know Mrs Zuriel?’

‘Mrs Zuriel, my dear,’ replied the widowed lady, passing her hand across her forehead as if to rub recollection into her brain, ‘what Mrs Zuriel do you mean?’

‘Mrs Zuriel, of Stor Court,’ answered Miss Enstridge, somewhat impatiently, for she was a young lady equally expeditious in thought and movement, while her mother was peculiarly slow in both; ‘please do think quickly, mamma, where you

knew her, she gave me a message for you when I spent a day there with Selina, and I want so much to understand it;’ and she proceeded to repeat the words referred to so rapidly that poor Mrs Enstridge became quite bewildered, and said she wished Frances would speak more slowly; then reflecting that she resembled her dear father in this respect, shed tears, when the idea struck her; so her daughter had to wait whilst she got through a few quiet gentle sentences of remonstrance and regret, and finished her weeping, and brought forth a fine cambric handkerchief and wiped her eyes, at the end of all which performances Miss Enstridge once again demanded where she knew Mrs Zuriel.

‘It is very singular,’ remarked the lady, ‘very; I never knew but one person of that name, and she was very poor indeed. Look, Frances, at that small house with the green door in the lane at the bottom of the garden’ (the conversation took place in Mrs Enstridge’s dressing-room, which commanded a view not only of the gardens belonging to the handsome row of houses in one of which she resided, but also of a narrow back street wherein abode poverty, and dirt, and misery); ‘well, my dear, you see it; one morning, ever so many years ago, I saw a man beating a woman just in front of that cottage, oh! so dreadfully, and I sent out the servants to prevent him killing her, and they brought her in. I went down and spoke to her myself: she said her name was Dorothy Zuriel; that she had been married two years; that her husband was very unkind to her, and that very often she was nearly starving; I gave her something to eat and money, and helped her from time to time after that, for almost a couple of years, then I lost sight of her; this is the only Mrs Zuriel I ever knew anything of, and surely she cannot be the wife of Mr Zuriel, of Stor Court.’

‘I am sure she is just the same Dorothy Zuriel you relieved,’ remarked Miss Enstridge, in a determined manner, ‘a poor broken-hearted, miserable-looking creature; she is wretched in the midst of all her splendour.’

And the young lady was quite correct in her idea, for the woman, whom quiet, amiable Mrs Enstridge had once rescued from the brutal violence of her husband, and on many subsequent occasions assisted with half-crowns and shillings, was the same individual whose death was thus reported in all the lead-



ing newspapers throughout England: 'On the 18th instant, at Stor Court, Dorothea, the beloved wife of John Zuriel, Esquire.'

The country journals devoted sundry half columns to an account of her death, funeral, and a record of her manifold virtues and charities; the procession of carriages, horsemen, and pedestrians that accompanied the mortal remains of their dear sister, departed to their final home, was a mile in length; and as Mrs Enstridge read the paragraphs sitting in her quiet room and glancing thoughtfully at the humble house with the green door, wherein Dorothy Zuriel had once dwelt and suffered, she could not but ruminate on the wonderful changes a few years work in the destinies of some. But what did it all matter to her who lay in the vault her husband had built for the reception of the bones of the Zuriels? what did it matter to her whether she had died in the humble cottage or the stately mansion? Oh! if happiness only dwelt in palaces how miserably millions of God's creatures would pass their existences; if wealth were capable of bringing joy and tranquillity with it, how blest multitudes of our fellow-creatures ought to be.

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## CHAPTER II.

CONSIDERING that money can purchase anything—save happiness and health—from a hat or a bonnet, to a wife or a husband, it is little marvel that Mr Zuriel, possessed in abundance of the golden talisman, and a beautiful, amiable, and fascinating daughter, set the whole of his very narrow heart on having, before he died, a Duke, or at least an Earl, for his son-in-law.

He scarcely ever looked at Selina, slight, pretty, graceful, without considering how she would adorn a nobleman's abode; but somehow noblemen did not seem to entertain a similar idea, and Miss Zuriel was permitted, to her father's inexpressible chagrin, to attain her eighteenth year, without a single duke,

earl, or even lord, soliciting her hand in marriage. How or why this came to pass, the owner of Stor Court was unable to divine; plenty of young clergymen, and younger sons of peers and baronets, and captains, and lieutenants, with Honourable prefixed to their names, though not in all cases to their natures, had been dismissed with indignation from the library, where Mr Zuriel lent an impatient ear to their vows, and offers, and entreaties, for they were not the sort of men to whom he desired to see his daughter wedded; but still the elder brothers and titled aristocracy never came either to be accepted or rejected.

The truth is, there was, despite of his wealth, a prejudice against Mr Zuriel amongst the old gentry and nobility, who hated the man, even whilst they asked the millionaire to dinner: he was useful to them in many ways; lent them money, entertained them handsomely, supported them with right goodwill, and, what was perhaps of more consequence, with a well-filled purse, at contested elections; he had a splendid house; was not an individual whom it would do to offend, for his wealth made him a personage of great consequence in the county; and so they tolerated, were civil, ay, even friendly to him: but still, notwithstanding his genealogical tree, laden as it was with golden leaves and Israelitish ancestors—notwithstanding his handsome mansion, his excellent wines, his capital cook, his remarkably pretty daughter, there was an undoubted prejudice against the man who had, as people ill-naturedly whispered, ‘found his Golconda in a clothes bag,’ and who, let him strive and struggle to eternity, could never become one of their set.

‘No, no!’ said Sir Hugh Turner to his bosom friend, the Earl of Faberleigh, when that nobleman, who had lately been left a widower, consulted him as to whether he ought to ride over, and propose for Miss Zuriel—‘No, no! hang it, money is a confoundedly good thing in its way, you know; and in the present democratic state of our country it is impossible to get on without it; money is a very good thing in its way, I admit, but blood after all is better; so if you ask my advice, I say don’t take Zuriel for a father-in-law.’

True, the baronet’s advice was not entirely disinterested, for he had long been considering and debating within himself the propriety of taking a wife, and that wife Selina Zuriel;

but still his remark expressed the prevailing opinion concerning the parent of the young lady, who, before she was much past eighteen, had rejected some dozen of admirers, for none of whom did she entertain any especial affection, and whom, moreover, her papa did not consider 'eligible.'

It has been asserted by some person somewhere, that, as a general rule, a girl will fall in love with, and (if not prevented) marry the first individual who propounds that mighty question, 'Wilt thou have me,' &c.; but the everyday experience of life goes far to contradict the veracity of this statement, or at least to prove that it only holds good when the 'first proposer' is the 'right proposer,' which in nineteen cases out of twenty he never turns out to be; consequently, as has previously been told, Miss Zuriel did not feel any particular *penchant* for her first admirer, nor yet for her second; and so on until the thirteenth, when she experienced a desperate degree of nervousness with regard to the result of his interview with her father, whom from her earliest years she had learnt not merely theoretically but practically to honour; if the meaning of the word honour be, as many parents imagine, to fear.

Far different was the case with the gentleman who in all the glory of scarlet and gold, with jingling spurs and a trailing sword, swaggered into that library where had been uttered the death warrant of many a long-cogitated matrimonial scheme.

Captain Arthur Auguste Delorme feared no man living. He said 'nothing completely conquered him but a pretty face;' to gain a smile from a fair lady, or to win the hand of her he loved, he was willing to march for a week, mount a breach, sleep in a military cloak upon the snows of Jura, beard the proudest Moslem, cross swords with the most courageous Frenchman; in fact, do anything and everything, even meet 'papa' and discuss the matter with him in a friendly manner, or else argue the worthy man into the belief that he and he alone was worthy to become his son-in-law.

The library at Stor Court was a long apartment, where books and their owner alike slumbered, the former perpetually, the latter occasionally. The four long arched windows which lighted it looked forth on pleasant lawns and ancient trees (how many an aspirant had gazed wistfully over that prospect as he entered the room, and sadly cast a



glance on it as he departed), and through an open casement the perfume of heliotrope, verbena, myrtle, and all sweet flowers was wafted through the library, and even seemed to penetrate the musty old leaves of the black letter volumes and ponderous tomes that, ranged in gloomy rows along the walls, guarded the chamber, and kept it almost sacred to themselves.

At the end of the table, around which a 'Committee of Inquiry' might easily enough have been accommodated with chairs, was enthroned the genius of the place, John Zuriel, who looked about as dry and uncompromising as one of the parchment folios he had purchased from an old vendor and collector of antiquities for a small fortune; whilst at a little distance sat Captain Delorme, the handsomest man in Lancashire, and the handsomest man but two of his own day, that graced when in town the pavement of Bond Street or the window of his club. He flung his military cap on the table as if to disembarass himself of all conversational encumbrances, ran his long slender fingers through his dark hair, twisted his moustache into a more becoming form, looked earnestly out at the grass, trees, and blooming flowers, and began—

'I have requested the favour of a private interview'—Mr Zuriel inclined his head as the suitor paused—'to speak to you concerning a matter,' proceeded Captain Delorme, 'which involves not only my own happiness, but also, unless I am greatly deceived, that of one near and very dear to you.'

'Perhaps, sir,' interposed Mr Zuriel rather brusquesly, 'you will find your own affairs enough to attend to just at present; suppose we confine ourselves to them.'

The officer bit his lip, but remembering it was *her* father who spoke, returned: 'When the happiness of two persons is bound up in a single question, it is impossible to speak of one without, directly or indirectly, alluding to the other; but to cut the affair short—for my profession is fighting, not talking—I love your daughter, and have some reason to suppose I am not altogether indifferent to her. Should this latter prove to be the case, will you give your consent to our marriage?'

'Spoken to the point, and modestly, too!' sneered Mr Zuriel. 'Now as you have been frank and concise with me, I must be equally so towards you, and say in three words—I *will not*.'

‘And may I inquire why not?’ demanded Captain Delorme, the colour mounting to his temples.

‘Nay,’ returned the owner of Stor Court, burying his hands in his pockets, and jingling sovereigns there in quite as *dégagé* a manner as his visitor twirled his moustachios—‘nay, you did not condescend to enlighten me as to the grounds which induced you to propose for my daughter, why should I be more communicative?’

‘I love your daughter, therefore I desire to marry her,’ said the officer.

‘Well, I love my daughter, and therefore am desirous that you should not marry her,’ replied Mr Zuriel.

‘I believe she is fond of me,’ replied the officer, in a manner half self-satisfied, half conciliatory; ‘I know you are devotedly attached to your child, and must beg you well to consider this matter, which, as I said before, involves the happiness of two individuals, one very dear to you.’

Though ladies thought Captain Delorme a sort of Demosthenes, he was no orator, and accordingly paused to hear Mr Zuriel’s answer, which came as follows:

‘I have considered the matter, and my daughter’s interests and my daughter’s happiness, therefore I repeat—it cannot be,’ and the jingle of the sovereigns became terribly audible, whilst the rejected suitor looked angrily out of the window, and the owner of the window looked steadfastly at him.

‘I am not very rich, it is true,’ said the former, after a dreary pause, ‘but still I have an independence, and should not have imagined *money* would have been an object to you.’

If there were one thing more than another which Mr Zuriel enjoyed, it was to send a sensitive lover off in *allegro tempo*, cut to the soul by an unfeeling dismissal, and to keep a bold one arguing and pleading on, whilst he sneered and refused; and, acting on this amiable principle, he said, in answer to Captain Delorme’s last observation,

‘And what, sir, do you propose giving in the place of it?’

‘Why,’ returned the officer, ‘I am not, as I said before, very rich, but I have an independence; I would do my best to make your child happy; I love her devotedly; and to revert to worldly matters, I fill a good position in society, and my family is as old as any in England.’

‘And mine as any on earth,’ remarked Mr Zuriel, sententially.

‘My ancestors came over with William the Conqueror,’ said Captain Delorme.

‘And mine crossed the Red Sea with Moses,’ retorted Mr Zuriel.

‘The first mention which is made in history of our family is in the reign of Charlemagne,’ suggested Captain Delorme.

‘Records in my possession speak of the Zuriels in Egypt,’ returned their veracious descendant.

‘Suppose,’ said the officer, with a withering smile, ‘we both commence with Adam, will that satisfy you.’

‘Can you trace back in a direct line?’ demanded Mr Zuriel, ‘for I can.’

‘No! but by a circuitous route I arrive at him,’ replied Captain Delorme, ‘and gain fresh ancestors at each step of the way.’

To which impertinent observation the father of his lady love merely rejoined by looking daggers at the officer, who, after a short silence, said inquiringly,

‘Will you re-consider your refusal?’

‘No!’ was the answer.

Captain Delorme arose, took his cap from the table, drew his fine figure up to its full height, and towering above Mr Zuriel, exclaimed angrily,

‘I will never beg any man’s daughter from him as a boon, but by Heavens—’

‘Well,’ inquired the owner of Stor Court, with a smile, as the suitor paused abruptly in the midst of his excited speech, ‘well, sir; by Heavens what?’

‘I will take her from him as a right,’ added the other as he strode towards the door of the apartment.

‘Stay!’ exclaimed Mr Zuriel, ‘one moment if you please.’

‘Let it be but a moment then,’ returned the incensed suitor, turning his flashing eyes on the speaker.

‘You say you love my daughter.’

‘I told you so,’ was the reply.

‘Would you wed her if she were poor?’

‘If she had not a shilling,’ responded Captain Delorme.

‘Indeed,’ ejaculated Mr Zuriel incredulously; ‘well, then,

remember that whosoever marries her without my consent, marries a beggar, for money of mine he, nor she, shall ever inherit. I am a man of few words, and speak to the point. I will never consent to her becoming your wife, and if she do so without my consent I will renounce her, and cut her off for ever; that is my unalterable determination; so now, sir, I wish you a good morning, and beg, as I am master of this house, you will not honour it with any future visits.'

Captain Delorme was in such a rage that he almost eat his moustachios, whilst he ground out from between his teeth imprecations and threats against the man he had just quitted: in truth it was not until he had quitted the gates of Stor Court, that he felt himself at all restored to anything like even comparative quiescence; for the descendant of the Normans was not the most patient individual in existence, any more than the last of the Zuriels was the most agreeable, and accordingly the former returned to his quarters, to cogitate plans of revenge, whilst the latter coldly ordered Selina to his presence, and spite of her tears and entreaties, told her she must never think of, nor write to, nor see nor hold any communication, either direct or indirect, with Captain Delorme, 'to whom he had,' he said, 'in like manner signified his wishes.'

So the worthy parent possessed himself of all the letters and little trifling souvenirs that the young officer had, through the instrumentality of Emily, her maid, conveyed to the hands of Miss Zuriel; possessed himself of these, and returned them with a brief note to the temporary abode of Captain Delorme.

One only relic the poor child preserved—a bouquet of faded but still fragrant flowers. For days she wept over them; they still remained clasped in her hand when, having fretted herself into a low fever, she lay tossing, and moaning, and raving in delirium; but the malady, like all other maladies proceeding from love, not proving fatal, she at length slowly rallied, and Captain Delorme's regiment went to London, and as he made no attempt to see Selina before his departure, Mr Zuriel said sneeringly to himself—

'I knew it was only for the money the fellow wanted her,' and felt satisfied; and he considered the affair to have ended, before, leaving his daughter in the care of the faithful female attendant, he repaired to Lancaster, in order to attend the assizes

which were then being holden in that ancient and well-known town; and on the evening succeeding his departure, Miss Zuriel, now much recovered, put on a bonnet and scarf and descended from her apartments into the beautiful garden they overlooked.

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### CHAPTER III.

THERE is, perhaps, nothing in the way of very quiet beauty pleasanter to contemplate, than an old English garden, with its trim yew hedges, cut into fantastic shapes; its rose bushes, that have survived many a fair lady who paused, in other days, to inhale the perfumes of their fragrant flowers, or it might be, to pluck one of the blossoms from its native stem to wither, and fade, and die, emblem of her own untimely end; its carefully rolled grass-plots, its beds of geraniums, carnations, and lavender; its gracefully trained myrtles; its arches of ancient yew, and barbary, and clematis; and last, though not least, its circle of stately trees, which shut out, as it were, from view, the world and its cares, the sights and sounds, and everything of life, save its quiet pleasures, from the little nook, thus set apart, in the midst of a fine estate, to the exclusive care and tending of some fair gentle woman.

Old gardens! Oh, how lovely when the cares and struggles of existence have scarcely left room in the human heart for the admiration of the beautiful scenes of earth—for its hills and dales, its streams and many waters; when the soul is weary of travel and much knowledge; when it yearns for the rest and the peace of the days that are gone, how lovely those dear old retreats of our childish hours appear to the eyes of memory!

Some rejoice for a season amidst the shrubs, the perfumes, and the assemblage of bright flowers that bloom, we love to think it, in such a place as they were wont to bloom in Paradise, and then rush blindly, eagerly forth to encounter what, sooner or later, all must meet—their destiny.



Some pining in foreign lands and under scorching skies weep when the sight of a simple English flower, the perfume of a familiar shrub, recalls that place to mind; others return to pace with restless or weary steps the paths where, in years long passed away, they thoughtlessly sported; and some, oh! how few, He who knows the secrets locked up in the bosom of each of His creatures, alone can tell—come back to their childhood's home with early hopes realized, early dreams fulfilled, early loves unchanged, early ties unbroken; come back with calm and thankful hearts to expend the evening of their lives in the old place.

Long ago, when no eye save Heaven's and mine own was near to note the incident, I saw one who for years and years had travelled and dwelt in cities, and been a welcome guest in all those scenes where the young and rich and beautiful congregate together—who was deemed the happiest of mortals—who had, perhaps, tasted every cup of earthly bliss, yet found a bitter drop lurking in the bottom of each; I saw such an one, I say, in the midst of a field white with daisies—the blue unclouded summer sky above, and the silence of nature all around, lie down amongst those common simple flowers, the sight whereof had touched some strange chord of sympathy in that world-tired heart, and moisten the earth with tears of bitterness; tears for the peace of mind passed away for ever; tears of regret for the days when such places seemed like the Elysian Fields; tears for the kindred gone down to their last home; for the friends estranged; the true hearts broken; tears for the truth, and the trust, and the hopes which had departed never to return; tears of bitterness for the weariness of the present; tears of repugnance to the dark aspect of the future.

Once, too, when the last of a gay throng had departed, when the lamps were out, the music hushed, the feet of the dancers still—in a room where the young and the happy had been but a few minutes before—one, the loveliest of all, the centre of fascination, the admired, and yet because of her amiability the unenvied, sat in the dim flickering of the firelight weeping, because a chance song recalled to her mind the memory of a home that had once been, and was not; from whence coffins had been carried; wherein sad lingering farewells had been spoken; from which brave young hearts had gone forth to

serve their country and to find an early grave. And oh! if the scent of a flower, the tone of a voice, the note of a song, be capable of awakening memories of early haunts, so powerful that the strongest and the weakest alike bend and soften beneath their influence, how long and earnestly should we reflect ere we voluntarily decide to leave that safe haven, our first home, which shelters us securely from the stormy waves of that ever restless ocean called by men 'the world.'

It had perhaps been well for Selina Zuriel had she thought more of the beauty of the garden wherein she had spent many an hour of childhood, more of the pain of leaving it, more of the parent who, cold and stern and proud as he might be, and undoubtedly was, yet had never refused to gratify her lightest wish save one; more of the world that lay beyond that state of almost infantine peace in which she had passed the previous years of her existence—it had been well had she thought more of all these things, and less, far less of one who, under the shade of clematis and barbary and yew and myrtle, was impatiently waiting for her.

How long Selina had hesitated ere she finally resolved on meeting him, how often she had paused and half turned back and listened and waited, no one but herself ever knew; the calm pale moon looked down on the fair slight form which at length issuing from the glass door of a small conservatory entered the old garden, and moved with tardy steps across the green sward, until at length the sound of her light tread struck on the ear of the watcher beneath the archway, who eagerly greeted the trembling girl.

It was the old story over again, a story that has been told since the beginning of time, and will probably be repeated till this world is not; which has for centuries been old, yet, which will in centuries still to come seem new; a tale some never tire of repeating; a story that to the great grandchildren of the present generation will ever be interesting, which each fresh actor and listener deems new and bright, and which after all is old and grave as the hills.

With Selina Zuriel and Captain Arthur Auguste Delorme it was indeed the old story over again, of two young people loving, vowing to live for each other, to die for each other, and so far all was well; but then, as has been seen, Mr

Zuriel refused his consent to their marriage, forbade the officer to enter his house, and ordered Selina to forget Arthur Auguste and his protestations for ever; which was part second of the same old tale; and then came the third portion of the story: the lover, obtaining leave of absence, lingering in the nearest town after his regiment had departed from its former quarters, lingering till Selina was better and her father from home, and writing a note entreating a *last* interview, which quite overthrew the girl's previously conceived determination to obey her parent and die in silence; then came the struggle betwixt affection and duty, and of course the former triumphed, and with its bright face put dreary old duty to flight, and—and—so at length Selina stood under the clematis arch with the gallant Captain Delorme, who repeated to her the words of the same old story previously referred to, in total unconsciousness that all he advanced was not something quite novel and decidedly original. He told her *how* he loved her, how he should die without her, how her father would soon relent if she once were actually married, how they must fly to Gretna, how——pshaw! we all know the tale, but it seemed quite new to Selina; she wept and remonstrated, and urged obedience and love for her parent, and with the tears streaming from her beautiful eyes declared, 'She was quite ready to die for Arthur, but fly with him *that* she could not do.'

'And your father will provide what he considers a suitable husband, and you will not die, but forget me, the poor soldier, and marry some wealthier suitor,' he said bitterly.

'Never, never,' she cried; 'he has the right, at least,' she added hesitatingly, 'so I suppose, to bid me refuse you; but even my father has no right to force me to marry against my inclination.'

'If you obey him now you will obey him then,' he persisted. 'If he say you must not love me and must love another, doubtless you can accommodate yourself with the same facility to either command.'

'You are unjust, sir,' she interposed, drawing up her graceful girlish figure, and speaking even through blinding tears with something of womanly dignity. 'You are unjust. You seem to imagine my heart is like the sand on the sea-shore which receives an impression from one hand that can be



obliterated by the touch of another. I know little of the world; yet I have heard it is men that love for a time, and women for ever.'

'And did you believe it,' he asked.

'The last part, not the first,' she answered simply. 'I have never been unjust to you even in thought, how much less in words.'

'I spoke rashly, and perhaps in this instance unjustly,' he said after a pause; 'but you have not seen the world as I have. I have known vows of eternal constancy interchanged, parents interfere, interviews forbidden; time has healed the wound in the heart of one sometimes—but rarely of both—a new husband is proposed; the bride elect weeps, then sadly agrees, then smiles, the wedding garments are purchased, the feast spread, guests invited, a ring provided, which is put on the slender finger, whilst a clergyman reads the few all-important words—then the pattern of filial obedience either forgets her former lover, or is made wretched for life. It is a very simple business, Selina—it remains for you to determine whether such shall be our lot.'

'Arthur, Arthur, it cannot be so with those who have hearts,' she exclaimed; 'we will live for each other separate.'

But here Captain Delorme vehemently interposed and asserted her idea to be perfectly chimerical, her plan totally impracticable; and as we have all seen a mother's heart divided between the opposing wishes of two of her children, now swaying towards one, now turning fondly to the other, and finally yielding to the son, or daughter, who seemed the most helpless or pleaded the longest and most earnestly, or whom she loved a degree the best, so poor Selina Zuriel wept and listened, and thought first of her father, then of her lover, her affection and her duty vibrating like a pendulum between the two; but at last coming to the conclusion that he who spoke so eloquently *must* be right, she gave a reluctant consent, and re-entered the home of her youth with a heavy load in her breast, engaged not merely to love but to marry Captain Arthur Auguste Delorme, who entertained a perfectly sincere attachment for her, and whose affection had been increased ten times by the obstacle her father had raised to their union; for it is a beautiful trait in human nature, and one which ought to prove con-

elusive to the believers in that extraordinary doctrine called 'human perfectability,' that the more it cannot get a thing the more it desires to possess it; which would of course seem to imply that the spirit of contradiction and love of opposition is *not* inherent in the hearts of the sons and daughters of Adam and their inquisitive mother Eve.

When John Zuriel, Esq., returned home, it was announced to him that his daughter had had a relapse, which was perfectly correct, but from this, as from her previous attack, she recovered, and at length emerged from her own chamber, looking very pale and miserable indeed, but, as her father in his simplicity imagined, resigned; and considering that he had indulged her preference for the officer more than a sufficient period, and that there was no time so advantageous for proposing a new lover as immediately after the dismissal of an old one, he speedily undertook to advocate the cause of the Earl of Faberleigh, who, spite of Sir Hugh Turner's friendly advice, had finally decided upon honouring Miss Zuriel with the princely offer of his small heart and large hand, to the intense mortification of the worthy baronet, who, after an immense expenditure of oaths and slang, declared he 'wished from his soul he had gone on the ground sooner, and run a heat for the girl himself.'

It was remarked on one occasion, by a young clerical sprig of nobility, that if Sir Hugh Turner only thought about his soul one half as much as he talked of it, he must be almost certain of Paradise; but our business, at present, relating not to souls but to hearts, it is necessary to return to the library of Stor Court, which has previously been named as the sort of audience chamber, whence Mr Zuriel, from his throne at the end of the table, dismissed the petition of humble and audacious suitors for the hand of his daughter and a due share of his worldly goods.

It was a summer evening, and the last rays of the departing sun flung a kind of glory over the old volumes, making them shine like the illuminated missals of the middle ages; it was reflected back from the dark wainscoting, from the oaken chairs, from the grim tables: its light nestled amidst the folds of heavy draperies; glided along the surface of the mirrors; giving a strange appearance of life to the pictures and busts, and portraits of those who had passed from earth for ever; it lent an additional air of sternness to the countenance of the millionaire,

and flickered, and played, and wavered through the fair hair of his only child, making her long rich curls seem to be composed of threads of the finest, purest gold.

'Selina,' said her parent after a few moments of silence, 'come near me, my daughter;' and at the summons, uttered as it was, in a kind, affectionate voice, the girl drew a low ottoman close to her father, and sat down beside him.

'You still look very pale,' he said, turning her fair face towards him; but perceiving that her eyes were full of tears, he permitted it to fall once again on her breast; whilst he gazed thoughtfully, first over the lawns, and then at the drooping head and sad attitude of his child. Had he known the words that were even then struggling in her heart for utterance, he would have been spared the difficult task of opening his mind to her.

'Selina,' he at length resumed, 'you are aware I have always desired that you should marry well.'

As if a serpent had stung her she started up, and holding out both hands passionately towards him, exclaimed,

'Oh, do not speak of that now!'

'And why should I not?' he returned, in a cold tone; 'you have had quite sufficient time to subdue any childish preference you may once have entertained for a man who sought you merely for your wealth; I have been more than indulgent to you, and now, in return, expect compliance and obedience; sit down, and listen to me,' and as he concluded he pulled her once again into the seat she had just left; whilst Selina covered her face with her hands, and a low moan escaped her lips.

'The Earl of Faberleigh, my esteemed friend,' pursued Mr Zuriel, pronouncing the last word with peculiar gusto, 'has done me the honour to say, he desires that our families should be united by closer bonds than those of mere acquaintanceship and friendship. As a man he is everything I could wish; as a gentleman his position is unexceptionable; as a nobleman his title speaks for itself.'

Having finished which peroration, he paused for a reply; but finding none came, he resumed,

'I need not enlarge on the advantages of such a connection, my dear Selina, for I am sure your own good sense will at once

discern them ; but I will merely mention that it provides you with a splendid establishment, places you in even a better rank than you have hitherto moved, gives you an affectionate husband, ensures a kind protector against the time when I shall be no longer here to watch over and to guard you ; in fact, the connection is one which in every way, yes, I repeat in every way, is most desirable, and now, my dear, I will give you a few days before I require a final consent to the Earl's proposals.'

'You need not,' murmured Selina, 'it cannot be.'

'Oh, you will think better of it,' answered her father, much as he might have spoken had he been humouring an over-indulged refractory child. 'You will think differently in a day or two, and in the mean time we need talk no more about it.'

'Father!' exclaimed she, rising once again and looking earnestly at him with a face so ghastly pale that he hurriedly ejaculated,

'Good Heavens, child! don't agitate yourself; I—I will give you a week, if you like, only do not look so like a corpse;' and he held out a hand as if to prevent her falling, for he really imagined she was about to faint; but she laid a gentle touch on his shoulder, and gazing intently into his countenance with a glance half beseeching and half fearful, said in a low tremulous voice,

'Did I ever disobey you before?'

'No, no,' he replied, soothingly, 'and that is precisely the reason I expect you to obey me now.'

'It cannot be! it can never be!' she said.

'Pooh! nonsense, child, go to your room, we will speak more of the matter when you are a little composed.'

'And shall I tell you why it cannot be?' she added, as if she had nerved up her courage for some great trial, and feared delay might scatter it to the winds. 'Shall I tell you?'

Somehow the wild earnestness of her manner sent a cold chill quivering through the frame of the millionaire, but he answered, 'I do not want to hear any sentimental nonsense, Selina. Marriage is a thing of reality, not a dream of romance, and I am determined you shall make a prudent settlement in life. I do not mean to listen to any remonstrances or absurd entreaties; I have expressed my intentions clearly; it now merely remains

for you to comply with a good grace to the arrangements I have made for your future happiness.'

He rose while he spoke, as though anxious to put an end to the dialogue.

'I—I *must* speak to you,' she gasped.

'Well,' he returned; 'speak quickly.'

'I cannot marry this Earl, because——'

'You shall; so there is an end of the matter,' replied Mr Zuriel sternly.

'Oh, father!' she exclaimed; 'if I tell you the whole truth—if I speak what is killing me—will you forgive me. Oh! say you will not cast me off!'

Light dawned on her father's understanding when he heard those words and looked in her troubled pallid face.

'Only speak it—only say *that!*' he answered, in a tone of suppressed fury, raising his hand threateningly.

She shrunk back a step, and the confession which had been so long in reaching her white lips, at last escaped them.

'Father, I am your only child; I never disobeyed you before—you will pity, and not cast me off for ever. I am married already.'

She stretched her hands towards him with a supplicating gesture, but the uplifted arm descended, and with a wild cry Selina Delorme fell senseless at her father's feet, the sound of a bitter curse ringing in her ears.

He never made an effort to raise her, but strode fiercely out of the apartment.

'Pack up your mistress's clothes—everything that belongs to her,' he said, addressing his daughter's maid, whom he encountered on the staircase, 'and tell me, woman,' he added fiercely, 'where the d—— is Captain Delorme!'

'Captain Delorme!' she repeated, 'I am sure, sir, I do not know; I suppose with his regiment, sir.'

'You suppose nothing of the sort. You need not now be afraid of letting me know, for I have heard of my daughter's marriage, and know you were accessory to it; where is he, I repeat? If you don't tell me at once, I will find some means of making you. Speak, woman!'

'I believe, sir,' she returned, with much trepidation, 'he is at B——.'



And in five minutes after, a groom was galloping to Captain Delorme with a message from the father of his bride.

‘Don’t cross the threshold of my house, sir,’ exclaimed Mr Zuriel to the officer, when the latter arrived, ‘I merely sent for you to take home your wife; here she is;’ and as he spoke Selina appeared leaning on the arm of the attendant who was to go with her.

‘Father, forgive me before I leave you, it is all I ask,’ she entreated.

‘From this hour I renounce and curse you,’ returned her parent; ‘see whether this man’s affection will prove stronger than my malediction; from my heart and my house I cast you out, ungrateful, wretched girl. Take her, sir,’ he continued, addressing Captain Delorme, ‘for she is now all to you, and nothing to me—nothing—no more than that flower which I fling from me,’ and he violently tore a cactus from its thorny stem and cast it at his feet.

Selina flung herself on her knees before him. ‘For the sake of the dead, for the sake of the affection you have always borne me, for the love of the great God, do not send me forth thus;’ but the father cast the supplicating figure from him roughly as he had done the flower, and Captain Delorme indignantly raised his wife in his arms and carried her to the carriage that was to convey her home—away from the familiar haunts of her childhood, from the old places and long-trying friends, to a new home in the house of a stranger.

‘If you repent hereafter, do not blame me,’ said Mr Zuriel to the officer, ‘for I warned you if she became your wife it should never be but as a beggar; as you have sown so you may reap, but money of mine she nor you shall ever touch.’

‘Keep your money, sir,’ returned Captain Delorme. ‘Thank God, I do not require assistance from any one, and if I did you are the last man on earth I should choose to seek it from; sorrow will yet come to your heart for the words you have this day spoken to the gentle being I am proud to call wife; be it mine to smooth her path through life, and give her greater love and affection than you are capable of bestowing on anything save yourself. Drive on,’ he added, as he sprung into the carriage; but as it rolled rapidly from the door, the sound of Mr Zuriel’s bitter laugh came borne on the breeze after them.

Selina did not hear it for she had fainted ; and so she left her home never to see it again ; and with an angry sneer and a dark and gloomy brow, her father turned from the step where he had held the above brief conversation, and re-entered the house where child for him was not, which now, from thenceforth, for ever, seemed to his soul, in spite of its stately magnificence, desolate.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

EVERY one arrived at years of discretion, and residing in this favoured country of England, whether brought up with all tenderness in a baronial hall, or kicked *sans cérémonie* out of a garret in St Giles ; whether protected from infancy by anxious parents, aristocratic friends, and clerical tutors against the slightest contact with vulgarity, or reared from boyhood to manhood in an atmosphere redolent with slang as with unwholesome vapours, has, I doubt not, heard, or dreamed, or read of a certain disreputable individual, the representative of a far too numerous class in the community, who, if the common proverb may be implicitly relied on, requires to be possessed of a 'good memory.' But is there not another personage belonging to an—of course—enlightened, truthful, and discriminating section of society, who stands in at least equal need of the above blessing with his far from respectable brother. I mean the inveterate or even merely occasional novel reader, who is often most unreasonably expected to remember the names, personal appearance, and, frequently dimly hinted at, habits of thought of various individuals, at the end of a couple of volumes or so, though he never heard them previously mentioned in his life before, excepting, perhaps, in a careless cursory manner at the very outset of the narrative ; and he is generally, moreover, abruptly and irrationally requested to connect them with the story after all that lapse of time, though where they have spent the interval, or why he has not at least seen occa-

sional glimpses of them at small stations along the road, or how they have managed to come up just at the proper period, and from what distant port they have steered their bark into the stream of the tale after so long an absence from it, he is left till it suit the writer to explain—if he ever do explain—in a state of blessed ignorance and intense mystification.

All this it must be admitted is tiresome to an extreme, and requires a stretch of resignation to endure meekly, which well entitles a reader to the admiring epithet authors have, since time immemorial, bestowed upon him—to wit, that of ‘patient;’ and yet there is also much to be advanced in apology of ‘tale-tellers,’ for as their imperfect powers unhappily preclude their performing the desirable feat of narrating two circumstances at once, it is quite indispensable that some of the actors and actresses in a novel should, when not actually engaged in representation, be ignominiously stuffed behind the scenes, and permitted to remain there until their presence is once again needful to the progress of the drama, when they are dragged out as disrespectfully as they were before pushed in, and their private concerns, hopes, feelings, passions, and characters exhibited in the broad daylight, for every man, woman, and child who lists, to stop and stare at.

For some useful purpose novel writers earnestly hope to advance some end, insignificant or otherwise, the public tacitly acknowledge by permitting thousands and tens of thousands of fictions to be spread abroad upon the earth; by selling, buying, and reading them.

‘All things work together for good,’ and must we not therefore believe that the effort to lay bare the sources of human action, the causes of human errors, the consequences of sin, and the results of striving to tread along the better, the holier, and the higher path, is a praiseworthy one, no matter how feebly the intention is carried out, how imperfectly the design is accomplished?

There are anatomists more or less skilful of the body, and yet the meanest amongst them is not scorned for the little he has been able to perform; he is rather looked tenderly on for the great good he has striven to do, and the small good he has actually effected. And may the anatomists of the heart not claim a like privilege, and humbly implore a similar forbearance,



for if it be impossible for them to dissect all their characters at once, and simultaneously to reveal what is passing in the home and breast of each individual, necessary to the progress of their story, still they do their best according to the talents nature has given them; and every mortal in creation, unless he be a most unreasonable specimen of humanity, confesses that those who do their best can do no more, in addition to which we all know it is quite as absurd to expect a person to write about two things together as to maintain that a man can live in two towns at a time.

Nobody, said an importation from that island, where, if the universal voice of society and the press may be believed, all the ridiculous speeches that ever were spoken are either hatched or uttered—

‘Nobody can be in two places at once, barrin’ he’s a bird,’ and that which proved an obstacle to the roving footsteps of one of Hibernia’s wandering children must surely be deemed at least an equal one to the pens of a less erratic tribe—the sons and daughters of literature, the constant, devoted, not particularly well spoken of, always scribbling, often weary followers of the quill.

Wherefore, dear and patient reader, will you, after this long apology, worse, perhaps, than the offence for which it was originally intended to obtain forgiveness, have the goodness to return along the somewhat dreary road of this narrative to its very commencement—chapter one—and pick up, what you are sure to find towards the end, a small article, which we unceremoniously dropped about that place, the name of a rather energetic young lady—Miss Frances Enstridge, who, having some connection with the progress of this tale, it may be well to introduce a little more particularly to the notice of those who mean to be fellow-passengers with her to the end of the story.

Having, thanks to your kindness, accomplished the feat of recovering that stray property, suppose we at once proceed to Liverpool, enter the house of Miss Enstridge’s mother, speak individually and collectively of the three members composing the small family, and relate a little of their history in as few words as possible.

At the period of Selina Zuriel’s marriage, then, her former

schoolfellow was approaching that neutral ground, five-and-twenty, which belongs properly speaking to no period of life save its own, since it is not an epoch in existence, but only a landmark on its surface; not a decided turning-point in the great highway, but just a milestone serving to mark how far the traveller has proceeded along it.

She had not reached that milestone yet, but she had got part of her way thereto: she had passed its predecessor as she passed everything else, with a quick, steady, observant glance. She knew she had just six months more journeying before her ere another birthday might be—to borrow a sentence from Fanny Kemble's diary—'met, greeted, and passed like a dream on the wide deep.'

Not on the deep waters of any mortal ocean, however, but on the stranger, deeper, more unfathomable waters of that wild rushing tide which keeps ever bearing its vast human freight forward to the boundless ocean of Eternity.

There are some women who do not much care, after a certain period, to talk about birthdays; who dislike counting too accurately the number of natal mile-stones they have toiled painfully by; who cannot be persuaded to tell of the thirty or forty winter snows they have seen descend, of the numerous springs they have greeted, of the gorgeous summers that have swept by them, of the countless leaves of the olden autumns they have wept to see fall—some, both men and women, who to the end of their days persist in telling falsehoods concerning their ages to their fellows, in the vain hope that they may get them to believe the fictions which, like many other fictions in the world, do well enough to laugh at, but most assuredly not to put implicit faith in. Frances Enstridge, however, boldly asserted at four-and-twenty what she subsequently asserted at forty, and at an even tenderer age, thirty-five, that 'she had no patience with such folly,' which indeed, as with most other follies and weaknesses of mankind and womankind, she had not. 'I am travelling rapidly towards thirty,' she took an audacious pleasure in stating in the presence of more fashionable ladies, who turned up their eyes in horror at such a declaration, which came the more *mal-apropos* as they looked at least ten years older than Miss Enstridge, whilst not pleading guilty to more sins than it might reasonably

be supposed five-and-twenty would cover. 'I am travelling rapidly towards thirty,' and so she was ; but still she had a long way to go before she reached that marked spot on the road to the grave, and therefore in spite of her random statement you, reader, may believe mine that she was just half way betwixt four and five-and-twenty, and looked decidedly younger than she actually was.

Short of stature, slight of figure, nimble of foot, quick in thought, rapid of action, you never could imagine age touching her ; she had not in her infancy been young, and it seemed as if, by way of balance, and set-off to that fact, even at seventy she would not be old ; as if she were a new freak of nature sent into the world, to remain stationary, and to look just the same out of her teens as she had looked in them, a rather pretty, remarkably well formed, undoubtedly peculiar specimen of a 'Lancashire Witch.'

Dark hair, gray eyes, fair complexion, oval face, good nose, open forehead, and frank mouth, these were the distinguishing features of one who never dreamt of laying any especial claim to beauty, who never was called handsome in her life, and yet was still possessed of sufficient material to have enabled her to start as a belle had she cared for the distinction, and not perhaps, unfortunately for herself, been an original. She laughed at admiration, despised compliments, refused offers, and travelled with an independent air, not merely along the road to thirty, but along the road to old maidenism, whither, she had said she did not mind confessing, she was journeying just as fast as the slow vehicle, time, could carry her.

Now there cannot be a doubt, but that the highway, 'old maidenism,' is one very free from care, annoyance, and anxiety, provided the pilgrim be possessed of the wherewithal to hire post horses ; fee postillions ; stop at good hotels ; and pay exorbitant bills, *en route* ; one smoother than that of matrimony, let the happy pair proceed along the latter in what carriage they list ; and yet without the companionship of friends, it is, though an easy, a lonely path ; and friends it seemed destined Frances Enstridge was never to have.

There was a something about her, which repelled them ; everybody confessed there was real goodness and genuine kindness in her nature, and yet still she had not the knack of

winning love ; perhaps one reason for this was, she professed to be able to live too happily alone, to induce any noble, gentle-hearted woman to turn from the home of the suffering and the afflicted, to one who affirmed she could do so well without her.

She was charitable to the poor, and yet still she could not console the distressed ; she had a horror of scenes, a hatred of sentimentality, a strange dislike to express her actual feelings ; an absurd fancy for concealing them, under a mask of brusqueness, which often hovered on the very edge of unkindness, and frequently touched the confines of rudeness.

Not until she had reached some of the milestones of middle life, left childhood, girlhood, and youth altogether behind her, did she meet with any one who thoroughly understood her full worth and the real tenderness of her character, and the reason of this was obvious ; she had an almost insurmountable objection to permit her nature to be seen ; excepting under very peculiar circumstances, she never evinced any emotion like other people ; you had to toil, and dig, and watch, and wait to discover of what stuff she was moulded ; and as she made it the business of her life to hide what the result of all these endeavours might prove, very few ever tried the experiment, fewer still went deep into it, none persevered far enough.

There are not three men at the 'diggins' who would voluntarily poke down into the earth, make holes, and work there like slaves on a sugar plantation, unless faith or hope or science or something assured them gold was to be found at the bottom ; and if not at Ballarat, why unquestionably not in England ; if not at the mines, certainly not in genteel society, could there be found one individual who would lay him or her self out to go hunting for treasure in a human heart, where it seemed likely nothing was to be got by way of return but a short, ungracious answer, or a sarcastic, unromantic laugh.

'She detested affectation,' she said, meaning that kind greatly in fashion in genteel drawing-rooms, and because she did so she donned a counter-garb of affectation fifty times more dangerous to the wearer than its opposite, simply because it bears so close a resemblance to reality that people, often confusing the cloak with its owner, generally mistake the shadow for the substance, and deal with the substance accordingly.

From childhood she had marched defiantly, resolutely through life; when a playmate would not give up a toy she cuffed her to obtain possession thereof; and this despotic temper always left a disagreeable impression on the minds of her little companions, which not even subsequent generosity, evinced by presents of dolls, sweetmeats, ribbons, and beads, was ever able completely to remove.

Even in her youngest days, it is true, she was just; she never wrested other children's property from them, but she liked to be sole mistress of her own, to recover miniature articles of furniture which had been taken without her permission, and in spite of her opposition; and to preserve her authority among her household gods, and her possession of her personal effects intact.

'I will give it to her afterwards if I choose,' she had been heard to say, at a very early period of her existence, 'only she shall not break it now without my leave:' but the liberal 'giving' afterwards never atoned for the decided manner in which Frances primarily made it a sort of principle to 'hold her own.'

She never in fact learned the art of how to avoid rude jostles in the crowded street; that lesson which once mastered enables any individual to escape blows, subdue pride, win confidence, gain friends. She started for a life walk along the thoroughfares of existence, setting the caution, 'give way,' at defiance. Give way she would not, and so she could get nobody to walk with her, nobody to look kindly at her, nobody to be very fond of her, no person to express attachment for her save her own immediate relatives, and those whose professions she despised knowing they loved her for the sake of what she had, not of what she was.

At school it was just the same as it had been in the nursery; she never refused to help a dunce at her lessons, never betrayed a trust, never pried into secrets, never revealed them if through any accident she became conscious of their existence; she was not mean, or stingy, or covetous, or envious, and yet still perhaps no girl was ever so little popular, alike with teachers, principals, and pupils; none certainly who had not some very decided fault, some crooked turn in her character, some great evil in her nature. She made no friends—that seemed to be



her destiny—with the exception of Selina Zuriel, she neither formed any school-missish attachment, nor excited any affection in return; and the real cause of this solitary fondness might perhaps have been found in the twining, gentle, loving nature of the child, who clung eagerly to a stronger character for support, and turned a beautiful, grateful face to one who assumed a sort of right to protect, half teach, and wholly manage the little ‘Jewess,’ as some of the more exclusive young ladies delighted to call the daughter of John Zuriel, the millionaire of Stor Court.

They were both at that time of life when six years’ disparity makes a greater difference than twenty might at a later period, and accordingly Frances installed herself as half mother of the fair delicate little creature, who always found refuge from taunts and ridicule by the side of her friend, and to her she would frequently come weeping, when her feelings had been wounded by some cavalier remark, or vulgar slight, for money, all powerful as it is, cannot purchase everything. It was impotent, at all events, to protect the child of the ‘old clo’ man’ from occasional annoyance caused by the unfeeling impertinence of some higher born young ladies, who, weighing their and her importance in their own self-sufficient, ill-adjusted scales, discovered that money was perfectly valueless in comparison with birth, and that, therefore, Selina Zuriel could only be ‘tolerated’ amongst them.

The rise had been too sudden—that was the misfortune. A man, after having spent the earlier years of existence in some unmentionable Liverpool alley, could scarcely expect all at once to take ‘rank’ amidst the Lancashire gentry; the child of him who was wont to chant Hebrew melodies in the neighbourhood of Old Hall and Tithebarn Streets, was hardly an equal to the daughters of the nobility and the proud old Cheshire families. So the latter insinuated at all events, and poor little Selina, *malgré* her father’s palace, his splendid carriages, his footmen, horses, riches, found herself snubbed more or less in a genteel manner at school by every one of her companions excepting Frances Enstridge. Wherefore she grew to like Frances, and took her to Stor Court, and showed her the skeleton it contained, but soon after that period they were

separated, for Miss Enstridge very shortly left the unexceptionable seminary and went home to cheer her widowed mother, while Mr Zuriel also removed his child, for some reasons which he never revealed to anybody, and had a governess for her, to whom he gave a salary whereat the county stared. Thus they were divided, as schoolfellows usually are, and Miss Enstridge formed no other particular friendship for any one of the numerous acquaintances with whom in course of time she was thrown in contact.

Truth was, all the love of her heart she lavished upon her only brother Frederick, a fine, handsome, gentlemanly fellow, some three years her senior, who had chosen law for a profession, and of whom mighty things were predicted. At one period indeed Frances Enstridge divided her heart between him and her father—with a sufficient amount of filial affection reserved for her quiet, gentle, not particularly-interesting mother—but the second having now passed from earth and its cares and its joys for ever, she fastened with a sort of despairing attachment on Frederick, found her hopes in his hopes, her pride, her ambition in him; pictured a fairy future for herself in watching over, and triumphing in, the career of the successful barrister. She would have lived, died, worked, starved, begged for him; it was a species of idolatry rather than love; it was a vehement concentrated adoration; he was all she cared for in existence—her brother's talents, her brother's goodness, her brother's superiority to every mortal who had ever previously existed—these were the subjects on which to discourse if you wished to fix her attention and win her heart; for though she rarely talked much of him herself, yet, as she thought about him constantly, the theme could not fail but be a pleasant one.

And he—yes, he in return was very fond of Frances; since childhood, an angry word or an unkind expression had never been exchanged between them; she gave in to him as she would not have done to her mother, had that estimable lady ever asked her to do so, which, indeed, she never did; there was no need to teach her tongue to flatter whilst praising him, for her admiration was so cordial and genuine that if she had only said half what she felt about him, people would have accused her either of downright idiocy or actual hypocrisy; and of course all this affection was not thrown away, Frederick had natural

feelings as well as she, and accordingly he did love his sister very much indeed, but not as she loved him.

For he had many friends, a wide field for action, a mother, who held the first place in his heart, a profession in which he hoped to rise, a great aim and object to accomplish, that of making a figure in the world; of rising to some immense height, of soaring—nobody knew where—possibly to the bench; he had, in fact, so many people and things to care for that Frances was only one amongst others—a very dear ‘one,’ perhaps, a trusted, valued, cherished sister, into whose ear he delighted to pour his ambitious fancies, his plans, his projects, his wishes, but still after all she was merely one, not all. For a long time it had been an uncertain question where he was to start in the career he had chosen; whether Liverpool, with old friends, or the metropolis, amongst new, presented the best field for the display of his talents, and this matter was finally left undecided till he should have completed his studies, and then—as Mrs Enstridge said with a quiet satisfied smile—‘we can see.’

But Frederick saw other people during that interval, who decided him, and when he wrote and informed his mother of this, and told her all he was about to do, a sort of blight fell on the heart of Frances Enstridge; from thenceforth she walked through life an altered, disappointed being. This was what came to pass about the period of Selina Zuriel’s runaway marriage—the young barrister fell in love, and how he happened to commit that folly, and what was the scene which ensued afterwards, I will tell you, dear reader, if you will be so kind as to turn over the page and commence with me another chapter.

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## CHAPTER V.

AMONGST Mr Enstridge’s London friends was a young gentleman of the name of Lacie, who having been brought up to become that vague professional, called by the vulgar, an ‘Inspector of Public Buildings,’ had ample leisure on his hands,



to grow very intimate with the embryo lawyer—so intimate, indeed, that he induced him to go down with him, the aforementioned George Lacie, on a shooting expedition into Suffolk, where he took him to see a second cousin of his, and introduced Frederick to her under the agreeable name of Lucy Luton. She was the daughter of a country clergyman, portionless, senseless, heartless; but exceedingly pretty, and excessively feminine in appearance; her manners were just the opposite of those of Frederick's sister; as mild, timid, gentle, and placid, as Frances' were self-reliant, domineering, abrupt, and uncompromising. She had spent a winter with her worldly cousin Mrs Lacie, and learned from her how desirable a wealthy London settlement would be; she had striven in town to meet Mrs Lacie's views, and not having exactly succeeded there, now did her very best in the country to fascinate Mr Enstridge.

Assuredly, however, there was no need for her to try; it must have been so fated, for Frederick just saw her blue eyes, and shining curls, and transparent complexion, and delicate figure, and then without further effort or wish of his own, fell frantically in love with her. That Suffolk journey, a few days at the vicarage house, a short conversation with Mr Luton, many long ones with Lucy, and the business was settled. Mr Enstridge returned to town an engaged man, and Mrs Lacie, on the match-making principle of keeping the suitor up to his mettle, found it desirable to grow ill about this period, and though she had daughters of her own to amuse her, got 'dear sweet Lucy up, to help,' and Lucy coming up, did help, by keeping the entire household in a bustle, concerning her wedding, and the dress she should wear, and the clothes she should buy, and the place they should live in, and the company they should invite, and the servants they should keep; for matters had got nearly to this point, and Lucy Luton was as foolish a little simpleton as ever put foot in a white satin slipper, and talked nonsense, not for hours merely, but for days together.

It might perhaps be considered by persons *au fait* in the etiquette of such matters a little against rule that Miss Luton should (accompanied by her cousin, Mrs Lacie, who required change of air) have gone down to the home of her *fiancé's* mother on 'inspection;' but whether according to the usual

approved mode of procedure or not, the fact cannot be disputed that the moment Mrs Enstridge heard there was a something in petticoats which had crept by some means into her son's heart, and taken that citadel by storm, a pretty something, respectably connected, with the odour of sanctity floating about it, she wrote, most urgently entreating a sight of it, and Mrs Lacie and Lucy Luton, nothing loath, were the consequences.

Mrs Enstridge's health was far from good; she could scarcely be expected to perform a pilgrimage to London for the sake of a pair of blue eyes, and yet still as she wanted to get a glimpse of those eyes, the matter was arranged as above recorded. Mrs Lacie, with decidedly more than an 'inclination' to *embonpoint*, and Lucy, whose figure could only be properly compared to that of a sylph, went down in great state from the house of the former, situated in Henrietta Street, Cavendish Square, London, to carry all sorts of strange unwonted feelings into the abode of Mrs Enstridge, who, with her daughter, resided in a handsome house near Great George and Rodney Streets, Liverpool, a locality which in those days was considered quite good enough to 'pass;' though now, alas! for time's changes, the latter looks nothing remarkable, and the former is dotted with shops. Fashion is ever on the move—a haughty dame who shakes from her feet at every step the dust previously contracted on the pavements of once familiar haunts. Belgrave Square would now disown one of its children who so far forgot his position as to stray into Thames Street or Bishopgate Street, unless, indeed, he could clearly prove he had merely passed through the latter in a cab *en route* to the Eastern Counties Railway Station; and yet still we all know whose palaces were situated in other days in the at present scouted regions. I wonder what the grandees of a century hence will think of Belgravia; whether they will regard it as an antiquarian curiosity, and marvel how any one could reside in such a place, or whether they will affect oblivion of its existence altogether; and when any Goth so far forgets himself as to mention the Square in genteel society, inquire with a drawl 'where—aw—that—Belgrave—may be—and if it be laid down in any map.'

And then again—what will the aristocrats of some future age think of the fashion ground of the twentieth century, and will

the tide always go on sweeping westward, or will the City ever again become the Court end, and Cannon Street a second Piccadilly? Less unlikely things have come to pass; such things may come to pass before London ceases to be the metropolis of at once the greatest and least empire in the world; before its site comes to be searched for by some Layard a thousand years hence, before Westminster Abbey be demolished, before Macaulay's New Zealander stands contemplating the ruins of St Paul's.

Perfectly satisfied, however, with the arrangements of fashion—in all respects unembarrassed by any thoughts concerning its numerous mutations, and quite convinced that people who lived in Henrietta Street in her day must, till eternity be considered genteel, Mrs Lacie sailed, in the full glory of black watered silk, Genoa velvet, Limerick gloves, and an extremely charming *protégée*, whom she was about to get well 'placed out' for life, across the handsome drawing-room of Mrs Enstridge's Liverpool house, and 'made up friends,' as the phrase goes, with the amiable hostess at once.

'This is Lucy Luton,' remarked that young lady's stout cousin, drawing the blushing girl forward to observation, and the widowed mother looking in the face of her son's choice, noticing the silky hair, and the white forehead, and the large eyes, and the pink cheeks, and the red lips, felt herself impelled to take the new arrival to her heart, and do what women do on every possible occasion that presents itself, weep over her tears abundant; while Lucy, not being one whit less expert than her future mother-in-law in this feminine accomplishment, began to cry too, and Mrs Lacie drawing forth an embroidered handkerchief, carefully shook the same, after which operation she applied the cambric in a proper manner to her eyes, so that altogether there was quite what Frances Enstridge afterwards indignantly styled 'a sniffing concert got up impromptu.'

The tears which fell from Mrs Enstridge's eyes dropped like balm, however, on the soul of Mrs Lacie, for she knew enough of her own sex to be aware that whilst gentlemen make over and transfer their properties with ink, ladies sign still more binding contracts in water; and accordingly she felt satisfied that in this mode Frederick's mother should resign a por-

tion of her interest in her son to Lucy, and in effect the widow actually did so, for with her, the fact of Frederick loving anything was quite sufficient to make her love it too; but with Frances the case was totally different—she possessed the clear sense her mother wanted—she wanted the unselfish attachment her mother possessed, and therefore it came to pass that the meeting between the sisters who were to be, proved very unlike the mingling of two streams; it rather resembled the Nile on one side, the Desert on the other.

Just at the very right second of time Mrs Lacie fortunately removed her handkerchief to behold their greeting, and the shrewd woman of the world rapidly judged how it was likely to be between them. Coldly and suspiciously Frances took the stranger's hand in hers, and as demonstrative marks of attention were the order of the day, and seemed to be expected by the visitors, she did not absolutely repel Lucy when that young lady not merely kissed but bedabbled her with tears; she fastened her gray eyes for a second on the blooming face, and turned them away again the next, heart sick, she could scarcely tell why.

Lucy was a confirmation of her worst fears—an embodiment of all she most detested in woman; not a creature gentle and timid and loving like Selina Zuriel, not a single-hearted, devoted, genuine, simple girl, but a silly, heartless, selfish being, with nothing, absolutely nothing, not even deliberate badness in her—incapable of caring for a man as he deserved, incapable of caring for any one save herself very long or very sincerely.

It is a decidedly questionable matter whether any wife Frederick Enstridge might have selected would, at this period, have found favour in his sister's sight, but one thing was undoubted—Miss Luton did not; and as a natural consequence, war was declared on Frances' part, and the foe was only prevented from answering the unmistakable challenge by the superior prudence and tact of her elderly cousin, who, with consummate address, managed to keep the peace between the belligerents for one entire fortnight, at the expiration of which period she deemed it best to receive important letters from town, and post back thither, accompanied by her charge, whom she earnestly desired to see safe in matrimonial shelter—for if Mrs Lacie had an object and mission in life, that object

was to make matches—that mission was to get ladies husbands and gentlemen wives, and she hoped by marrying Lucy, to secure not merely a comfortable provision for her ‘dear aunt’s dear child,’ and a pleasant house for her own girls to visit at, but also a rich bride for her indolent son, George Lacie, in the person of Mr Enstridge’s sister Frances.

Therefore she beat a retreat from Liverpool with all colours flying, and crossed on the way to London, Frederick Enstridge, who was hastening from the metropolis as fast as four stage horses could carry him—for he travelled per coach—Mrs Lacie per chaise. Mrs L. did everything genteelly—even to giving the crossing-sweeper a penny, deputing her tiger to the office of almoner-general of her ladyship’s bounty, at which piece of refinement I regret to add the ungrateful little wretch was in the habit of laughing and mocking, pulling faces whenever the lady’s back was turned, and making irreverent speeches concerning both herself and her attendant, such as, that he ‘thought she might be trusted out alone;’ together with various comments on the weight any one who ran away with her would have to carry, on the disproportion her heart bore to her body, and other sneering observations on fine ladies generally, and their flunkeys particularly, which impertinence was merely a natural consequence of his being born in the County Limerick, where he had been taught to believe that England’s wealth was the sole cause of Ireland’s misery.

He was indeed a little vagabond, and therefore Mrs Lacie could not soil her genteel gloves by dropping a copper into his dirty hand that had never been washed, so he unblushingly declared, ‘in his memory,’ which declaration was quite as untrue as the libels he uttered against poor John Dobson, tiger-ordinary to Mrs Lacie, who got safely back to London, as Frederick Enstridge did to Liverpool—whence, to his infinite mortification, he found his bird flown.                   ”

‘Yes, dear, she is unhappily gone,’ said his parent, making him sit down beside her. ‘Mrs Lacie received letters which compelled her to start at once, although I wanted them to remain another week.’

‘Well, mother, and so you are content with her?’ he remarked, after a pause, with a bright smile.

‘More than content,’ Mrs Enstridge answered—rightly



understanding 'her' to stand for Luton, not Lacie—'more than content: a sweet pretty creature—so mild, timid, and retiring. I could have loved almost any one for your sake, Frederick, but there is no need for that here—I love Lucy for her own.'

'And you, Frances?' said the young barrister.

'I will tell you some other time,' she replied in a tone which chilled and repelled him; 'another time—not now.'

There was an awkward silence: then Frederick resumed—

'You remember, mother, we used to discuss the propriety of leaving Liverpool altogether, and taking up our abode in London, and you always said you would cheerfully leave this town if, upon consideration, it should be deemed more desirable for me to begin in earnest the great battle of life in England's mighty Babylon; and I have thought and pondered long concerning it, and feel quite sure, the more I think, that London is the place for talent of all sorts; I have no doubt I can rise to eminence there, after the commencement I have already made—I have many friends, fair prospects, and, in short—'

'You prefer what Miss Luton prefers,' finished Frances, sharply:—'London and Mrs Lacie, to Liverpool and your mother.'

'What a cruel speech, Fanny,' began Mrs Enstridge, but Frederick interposed by asking his sister, somewhat sternly, 'what she intended to imply?'

'I will tell you some other time,' she said, in the old tone—'not now.'

'I had rather hear it now,' he remarked.

'I should prefer not telling you,' she returned.

'Now, Frances, do not be so strange and mysterious,' implored Mrs Enstridge, 'cannot you answer his question at once, as he wants an answer to it?'

Her daughter paused for a moment, as if deliberating the propriety of some disagreeable course of action; but then returned, speaking in an emphatic manner:—

'I can answer him at once, and perhaps it is as well that I should do so before you, though I had intended otherwise—though I had resolved not to grieve you by an expression of my opinions; though I had determined to speak openly to Frederick only in your absence. You have asked me two things,' she added, turning to her brother; 'first, what I think of Lucy



Luton ; and second, what I think of yourself ? and in reply I say, I consider her a simpleton, and you a fool for proposing to marry her !’

‘ Frances—’ began her brother.

‘ Do not get angry,’ she interposed ; ‘ do not interrupt me ; as I have begun, I will finish. I know little good ever comes of talking sense to a man in love, of trying to reason with one who, though not actually an absolute lunatic, still is rambling through life, for the time being, without the whole of his wits ; who thinks happiness, excepting on certain terms, an impossibility, who can see perfection nowhere but in one face ; who fancies there is right and justice only on one side of an argument, and that his own ; and concludes that those who judge impartially, must be wrong, whilst he refuses to believe that he also is completely blinded by prejudice, is incapable of forming rational conclusions on any subject. I am aware truth is rarely acceptable to any one, never so to a man in love, foolishly, absurdly in love as you, Frederick, are ; but nevertheless I am resolved to speak it to you, and say you are throwing away valuable affection on a weak, senseless, extravagant, useless being, who can never give you anything worth having in return ; you are exchanging a spirit for a body, a heart for a sham, the prospect of your life for a delusion.

‘ You are my sister,’ he began hurriedly, ‘ otherwise—’

‘ I am your sister,’ were the words she cut him abruptly short with. ‘ I am you sister, otherwise I should never take the trouble of speaking as I am doing ; I do not much hope that my warning will cause you to turn back, before it is too late ; but still, hopeless as I feel, I think it right to remonstrate. You have fallen in love solely with a pretty face, pretty enough for that dollish style, I admit ; and you mean to marry its possessor, and bring cares untold upon yourself ; an extravagant, whimsical wife, and a whole host of her demi-semifashionable relations, who will drag you into expenses you will scarcely be able to meet, destroy your happiness, harass your spirit, break your heart ; you are intending to connect yourself with a clique, who place faith entirely neither in birth, education, nor money ; but partly in the first, partly in the last, and greatly in a certain style, an unmeaning etiquette—footmen and liveries, silver waiters and ceremonious calls, solemn dinner

parties and eternal balls. Mrs Lacie is a woman who would, unless I am greatly mistaken, spend a million a year, if she had it, and tempt other people into extravagances they might never dream of without her help. If your wife had an ounce of sense, the ideas and follies of her relations would be a matter of very secondary importance; but she has not, and I tell you, Frederick, you are throwing real respectability, the probabilities of great ultimate success, the hopes of fame, the true disinterested affections of your nature, away, to obtain something you will find, too soon, would be dear at any price, or none. I have tried—'

'I wish, Fanny, you would stop,' sobbed poor Mrs Enstridge, really exceedingly discomposed at the picture her daughter was drawing of the young barrister's future. 'I wish, Fanny, you would stop; you are making me feel so very uncomfortable.'

'I do not want to distress you,' returned Frances. 'I am very sorry indeed to do so; but it is better for me to say out all I have to say, and then we need never touch on the subject again. I have tried,' she added, turning to her brother, 'to surmount the prejudices I have always entertained against very weak, useless, fashionable, sentimental young ladies, and to believe that there is something more to recommend Lucy Luton to favourable attention than her transparent complexion, dollish expression, and childish manners; that there is good in her nature, which may at some future period be developed; that she is a girl fit to become wife to a sensible man, capable of proving herself a true helpmate to any rational creature. I have tried with my whole soul to like and admire and esteem her, but in vain. I grieve from the bottom of my heart at the alliance you are about to form—the set you are proposing to plunge into—the absurdity you are intending to commit. I do not pretend to be indifferent to money, but I would cheerfully, thankfully, give you every shilling of my fortune if I could by doing so induce you to reflect ere you have made that trifling creature your wife—ere you have taken her for better for worse—made her a companion, a burden, a sorrow, a care, a repentance for life.'

'And I would cheerfully give all my fortune to get you to keep silence, and not meddle in my affairs,' retorted her brother almost fiercely.

‘I do not want to meddle in your affairs,’ she returned, ‘and should not dream of interfering now, excepting for your own good.’

‘And should you call it for my good to plight my faith to a girl one day and cast her off the next,’ he demanded; ‘to give the whole love of my heart to the most affectionate creature who ever lived, and then take back the voluntary gift; to jilt one who is willing to leave everything for my sake; to give up a gentle wife at the bidding of a strong-minded sister; to mould my actions according to your ideas; to relinquish my plans solely because they do not happen to suit your fancies; to reject friends because you do not approve of their style of living; to accept your opinions of others instead of deducing conclusions about them for myself. The fact is, Frances, you are angry at my daring to choose a bride without first asking your permission to do so; you would like to dictate for and rule everybody: you have taken up a set of extraordinary notions, which, had you been a man, contact with the world would very soon have rubbed out of you; and you fancy every person who does not think exactly as you do, who has not the same ideas, who has been differently educated, moved in another class, been born in a far-off parish, is inferior to you in mind, sense, amiability, cleverness, and so forth. I know why you are so much irritated now, and can accordingly make some allowances; in the first place you did not want me to marry at all, and in the second you do not wish to leave Liverpool; and consequently feel angry at a most innocent being who has never injured you nor any one else in the world, and for whom I thought my sister would have felt some affection, had it been only on my account.

He spoke in a half passionate, half sorrowful tone, but Frances was not to be mollified.

‘Your sister,’ she returned bitterly, ‘will always feel affection for those who are worth caring about, both on their own account and yours, but I am not a simpleton, and cannot shut my eyes to facts. I will never open my lips after this evening on the subject, for you are old enough to choose for yourself, and having warned you I feel myself freed from the responsibility of consequences I foresee impending.’

‘I can bear the consequences of my own actions in my own person,’ said Frederick, sharply.

‘I fear you will have to do so,’ retorted his sister; ‘but as to what you said about my not wishing to leave Liverpool, you are wrong; one place on the earth is much about the same to me as another, and I would joyfully promise to pass the remainder of my life on some desert island, if I thought by so doing I could promote your ultimate happiness, and secure you against the misfortunes your own determined folly will, I dread, bring upon you. I tell you truly, the news of your intended marriage did fall upon me like a blow, for I had hoped and believed that you would have taken fame for a bride, and won her smiles, before you thought of settling down and tying yourself with irrevocable vows; fettering your actions, and clogging your steps with the bonds of matrimony; but I could have got over that; I could have relinquished my right to encourage and cheer your efforts, sympathize in your anxieties, rejoice at your success—to a stranger, providing that she had been one deserving of you, one capable of loving you as I do, of admiring and appreciating you as you deserve. Oh, ‘Frederick!’ she vehemently exclaimed, by way of a finishing query; ‘why if you *must* marry, can you not choose some one more sensible, more worthy of you, than that little silly, stupid, crying, laughing Luey Luton.’

This was really more than flesh and blood—that is, more than flesh and blood in love—could profess to endure with patience, and accordingly, Frederick, being no more than man, retorted with much acrimony; and Frances, being no more than woman, responding thereto in a very warm decided manner, the discussion rapidly assumed the character of a quarrel, and Mrs Enstridge interfered to no purpose; and many unpleasant truths were uttered on both sides; and finally, where the matter might have ended it is impossible to say, had not Miss Enstridge at length indignantly quitted the drawing-room, remarking before she banged the door of that apartment behind her, that there were three people to whom it was of no use talking sense, viz.:—‘A bigot, a lover, and an idiot; and that Frederick Enstridge unfortunately happened to combine the two last characters in his own.’

Then Frederick had a long conversation with his mother, whose mind he entirely disabused of the disagreeable ideas his sister’s sweeping assertions had caused to find an entrance into

that rather vacant chamber, and he talked her again completely round to his own and Lucy's side of the question, and the next day there was a species of reconciliation effected betwixt the young lawyer and his sister, and in due time the former, following what every individual in creation would follow if he could, the bent of his own inclination, became a married man, and Mrs Lacie felt she had got one of her desires accomplished at last, when in due time her cousin, pretty Lucy Luton, after a very grand wedding, at which her reverend father was the officiating clergyman, and the Misses Lacie the charming bridesmaids, might be deemed fairly settled, and became Mrs Frederick Enstridge, wife of a barrister-at-law, who applied himself most assiduously to mastering the mysteries and unravelling the knotty difficulties of his profession.

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## CHAPTER VI.

IN the 'good old days' of our ancestors, when ladies spent their lives in spinning hemp, pickling cabbages, working Ottoman cushions, and occasionally quietly wandering over or violently assaulting the yellow keys of an antique spinet, whilst their lords and masters, the originals of that 'fine old English gentleman' we are in the habit of hearing every now and then lauded to the skies—industriously followed the hounds all day, and circulated the claret bottle all night; when betting, drinking, eating, and smoking formed the staple amusements of the dining-room; and the cookery book, and an old volume of ballads, constituted the literature of the boudoir (if there were boudoirs then in the houses of country squires, appropriated to the use of country squires); when highwaymen were to be met with by every road-side as frequently, all the year round, as blackberries in October; and a journey through England was attended with more danger than in these degenerate times a pilgrimage from Paris to Pekin could possibly be—in those never to be sufficiently regretted



'good old days' of our ancestors, I repeat, the distance from London to Lancashire was something quite appalling to the minds of men, who prefaced a visit to the metropolis by making their last will and testament; and whose return home, if they ever did return home, in safety, was hailed as an event decidedly more miraculous than at present the advent from the Crimea of an officer possessed of his full complement of limbs might be considered.

For in that not very remote age a journey was a thing actually deserving the name; it was a solemn reality, a business to be prepared for beforehand, an event to be remembered afterwards. It involved a considerable expenditure of time, money, patience, forethought, courage; it could not be accomplished in a hurry; it could not be forgotten speedily; it was not an affair of getting a letter at breakfast time, stuffing a couple of shirts and *et ceteras* into a carpet-bag, calling a cab or hailing an omnibus, hurrying off to the railway station, tearing over the ground at the rate of forty miles per hour, lunching at Birmingham, dining at Lancaster, supping Heaven knows where, perhaps in the cabin of an Irish steamer, perhaps in a Scotch hotel, transacting any amount of business in some outlandish place, and returning in the course of a day or two to town, where you inform somebody who first gives you a finger to shake that you have been down south, or away west, or up north; just as if south were no further off than Kennington, west than Belgravia, and north than Dalston. Travelling long years ago was nothing like this; it was a matter of fact, earthly, serious, dangerous, yet withal, romantic business; it was a plodding over turnpike roads, with highwaymen or the terror of them haunting every step; it was a carrying of pistols, and eating of many dinners, and coming in contact with many strange characters, and encountering of various extraordinary adventures; it was a thing to be accomplished by slow steps, to be impressed by jolts and discomforts on the memory, to be talked of in after years, never to be effaced from recollection. Ask a man in these days how often he has looked at his own reflection in the large mirror in the refreshment-room at Swindon, and after racking his brain he will inform you he has been there so often and to so many other places besides that he really cannot remember.



But I wonder how many great-coated old gentlemen, in the time of our grandfathers, would have forgotten the number of times they shaved before the green cracked apology for a looking-glass in that dreary road-side inn, where, for some inexplicable reason, they were always doomed by fate to pass the night whenever they journeyed through Yorkshire. I wonder how many would have answered 'Really I can't remember!' I should say not one.

For people used to travel on the earth and meet with a good many adventures by the way; now they seem to speed through the air, and have no leisure to observe anything, for they are scarcely lifted at one station before they are dropped at another; no person performs journeys in England now, and a genuine traveller is a commodity rarely to be met with on this side of the Rocky Mountains; but for all that, we know there was a period not remote when a pilgrimage from Lancashire to London was a very serious affair, although in these fast days that period does indeed appear to our much-seeing eyes to have had its existence in some strange state of society—long, long ago.

Since then, however, while the actual distance by miles has, to the best of my belief, not diminished, the distance by time unquestionably has; and what after all is distance but time, which railroads have in these later days—a hundred blessings on them for it—almost annihilated. Yet rapid as locomotion now is, it is slow, a very tortoise, in comparison to what the velocity of thought always was; and as the pen of the novelist has never been anything more than a vehicle to convey the thoughts of the writer and the imaginations of the reader from place to place, and from scene to scene, with a quickness only second to that of light, though, alas! too generally without its brilliancy, I must here again venture to take an author's privilege and ask the individual who may chance at the moment to be perusing these pages, to travel from Liverpool to London, with no more ceremony or delay than that caused by closing one chapter, commencing another, and prefacing the same with the preceding observations on the relative advantages of steam and stage, rail and road, coachman and stoker, the days of our ancestors and the days of their descendants; therefore, if you please, dear reader, without stopping at a single other mental

nalting-place by the way, we will leave Lancashire in our rear and proceed to Harley Street at once.

In the last-mentioned locality then, situate, as everybody knows, off that not very handsome but sufficiently fashionable square of Cavendish, we find ourselves, after a long cross-country journey, performed by us straight as the crow flies, once again at the residence of Mrs Enstridge, her daughter, daughter-in-law, and son, the two latter of whom were the primary, or, to speak more correctly, sole, causes of the lady's change of abode and pilgrimage from the banks of the Mersey to those of the Thames; for Mrs Enstridge, senior, loved her son so much, was so entirely devoted to him, so proud of his talents, so certain of his attachment for her, and so ceaselessly anxious concerning his health and happiness, that the only conditions she tacked to her consent to his marriage were that she should not merely live in the same street, but also in the same house with her dear Frederick and his pretty wife, whom from the bottom of her heart that strong-minded young female, Frances Enstridge, cordially hated. People consequently wondered she went to Harley Street, but she said, 'where my mother goes I go,' and go she did accordingly.

'The only thing which could induce me to marry,' said she to her sister-in-law one morning, after an altercation in which both sides had displayed more candour than politeness; 'the only thing which could induce me to marry would be to get rid of you.'

'And why do you not marry then?' demanded Mrs Enstridge, junior, and wonderful to relate there was no taunt intended by the question, for she knew perfectly well that her sister had suitors in plenty, and might choose any day. 'Why do you not marry then?'

'Because,' replied Miss Enstridge, with that amiable frankness which was one of the distinguishing features of her character, 'a husband might annoy me almost as much as yourself, and he would be a fixture for life, whilst you are only one for a time, at least I hope so.'

'I wish,' whimpered the other, who always took refuge in tears as a *dernier* resort, 'I wish Frederick would take another house; that I do.'

'And so do I,' retorted Miss Enstridge, 'or that my mother

was not so ridiculously fond of him, and would leave him to you and let us go. I am sure I do not want to turn you out of Harley Street; I only desire not to stay in it myself.'

'I had rather live in the Temple,' pursued Mrs Enstridge, 'in those horrid chambers of his in Paper Buildings, or even in Chancery Lane, than stay here to be so perpetually quarrelled with.'

'Well,' returned Frances, 'all I want is peace, and if you will just allow me to pursue my way and not interfere with all my actions, I will promise to let you commit suicide if you like, without raising a finger to prevent you; but, as I have told you fifty times before, I am four years past one and twenty, and if I am not old enough now to manage my own affairs and take care of myself, why I am fit for a lunatic asylum, that is all.'

'I am sure,' exclaimed Mrs Enstridge, 'I do not desire to control you nor to interfere——'

'Then why are you everlastingly doing it?' demanded Frances.

'Because my aunt and Frederick and every one says you do most extraordinary things, and for the credit and respectability of the family, Fanny——'

'Credit and respectability of nonsense,' retorted Miss Enstridge, with much warmth, 'your aunt, I have no doubt, is a most exemplary woman, but you will excuse my saying she has very little sense; and as to Frederick, he never thought of such things till you put them into his mind; and for the 'every one else,' if you mean by that the Lacies, and Fanshawes, and Gregorys, I do not value their opinion in the least, and shall manage to get through life, I have no doubt, without their approval. I am not going to marry to please them and become a respectable settled young matron, and I will walk into Regent Street if I choose without young Lacie at my elbow to select a dress or a piece of ribbon; and should my mother be tired and an omnibus be nearer than a cab I will ask her to go in it, and consider myself after all as much a gentlewoman as Mrs Lacie, whom we met the other day in Langham Place attended by a miserable little tiger; and after we left her I said, 'only think what a diminutive atom of a boy to take care of such an immense woman.' Positively, Lucy, you would have laughed yourself had you been there, she looking as

if she could sink a man-of-war, he seeming as if a simple touch would suffice to annihilate him.'

And at the bare recollection of Mrs Lacie's portly figure, Miss Enstridge forgot her anger, but her sister-in-law, who had a knack of hammering perpetually away on a particular theme, like a boarding-school miss at one of Kalkbrenner's Sonatas, gravely returned—

'Mrs Lacie is a very worthy person, Fanny, and my first cousin, and——'

'Yes, yes; I admit all that, and wants me to marry your second cousin, George Lacie, though I am what she calls an original; which for that very reason I won't do; but still she is not a sylph, and her tiger, poor little Robert Dobson, whose mother I am sure never imagined her darling would be transformed either into a beast of prey or a guard of honour, is not a Goliath; what I mean is this, I do not quarrel with you because you had rather die than walk from here to Piccadilly without Frederick or mamma, or a servant or somebody to take care of you, and I want you to extend a similar privilege to me, and not be continually endeavouring to impress me with the "proprieties of life," things I never heard spoken of till I met you, and which I believe are unknown outside the boundaries of London, where it seems to me people ought to be able to do just what they choose, if that be possible anywhere, because no one pays the least attention to or takes the least notice of his or her fellows.'

'I assure you, Fanny, you are quite mistaken; Mrs Gregory says——'

'A great deal that no one will ever be benefited by hearing, Lucy,' interposed Miss Enstridge. 'I feel confident the extreme fastidiousness of an especial clique in London arises either from excessive vanity, or excessive folly; they think their little circle is "the world," that every one, instead of attending to his own business, is watching and admiring them; that they are to lay down a number of impracticable rules for other people to follow; that because they can afford to keep carriages and servants, and footmen and tigers, all who have not the means to "go and do likewise" are to be scouted from *respectable* society (meaning theirs): no, no, I endeavoured for a little time to act as Mrs Lacie says, "properly," but found the

attempt utterly futile, and now we will, if you please, stop arguing about it; for I know nothing on earth could convince you I am right, and you know nothing on earth could convince me I am wrong—so shall we abandon the question?’

It is marvellous to consider what trifles frequently destroy domestic comfort; it was literally on the vexed subject of whether or not it is *comme il faut* for a lady to walk unescorted, half-a-mile from her own home, that the sisters-in-law managed so perpetually to disagree—neither would concede one iota to the prejudices or fancies of the other—Miss Enstridge would not be placed under the protection and surveillance of John, her brother’s footman; Mrs Frederick Enstridge almost wept when she beheld her cross the square alone; and the brother and mamma of the independent young lady declared, in answer to her sister-in-law’s entreaties for them to put a decided stop to such improper practices, ‘That really they saw nothing wrong in them beyond the conventional idea—that Frances was now of age, was possessed of property beyond their control, and would, as they knew by experience, do whatever best suited her own inclinations, in spite of King, Lords, and Commons.’

And thus matters stood, when one morning, a few days after Selina Delorme quitted the paternal mansion, Miss Enstridge greeted the astounded ears of her mamma and sister-in-law with the following announcement—

‘Do you know, I am seriously thinking of marrying.’

‘Whom, my dear?’ demanded Mrs Enstridge in her quietest tone, and as though beyond mere curiosity, she had neither share nor care in the matter—‘whom, my dear?’

‘Well,’ returned Frances, with a slight blush and laugh, ‘it is a curious choice for me, is it not? however, you know, opposites it is said agree—see, for instance, how charmingly Lucy and I get on; but, dear mamma, the happy man is Mr Imlach.’

‘A clergyman!’ gasped Mrs Frederick.

‘Rector of Ilpinden,’ remarked the elder lady.

‘Yes; so you perceive, Lucy, there is hope for me yet,’ returned Miss Enstridge; ‘and, mamma, he is coming to-day in all the glory of a starched cravat and unexceptionable broad-cloth, and boots like looking-glasses, to ask your consent, so I thought it better to tell you I had accepted him, because per-



haps otherwise you might have said :—" Dear and reverend sir —I should be delighted to have my daughter settled in a parsonage, under clerical surveillance, but as she considers her vocation is not to instruct straw-bonneted children, and listen to old women's ailments, there is no use in asking her, or proceeding further in the matter." This is what you might have said, but now you will understand I mean to marry him, and accordingly you must answer, with a gush of motherly feeling blinding your eyes :—" I confide my treasure (me, you know) to your keeping, and trust that you will make her happy, as she deserves ! "'

' And so,' exclaimed Mrs Frederick Enstridge, ' you have really and truly accepted Mr Imlach in preference to my cousin George ? '

' Thou hast spoken,' returned Frances, ' with all thy accustomed eloquence, and more than thy accustomed discrimination.'

' It is my belief, Frances Enstridge,' continued her sister-in-law, ' that the spirit of opposition is the most strongly developed trait in your character.'

' Lucy,' mildly interposed Mrs Enstridge.

' Pray, mamma, allow her to evaporate,' said Frances, who enjoyed her sister-in-law's anger beyond description, ' she is only a little annoyed because I have dared in this as in other matters to choose to act for myself.'

' George Lacie is worth a thousand of that—'

' Stay,' interrupted Miss Enstridge, ' remember Mr Imlach is a clergyman, and Mrs Gregory says—'

' That you never yet did nor ever will do a thing like any other person,' responded the other lady ; ' she always declared you would make some extraordinary match, and you see her words have turned out true.'

' Not exactly ; she affirmed I would disgrace the family by some *mésalliance*, now you see, *au contraire*, I am bringing you all at once into the bosom of the Church, and flinging a sort of odour of sanctity around my friends, which makes even your present anger, Lucy, seem merely a sort of Christian cousinly championship, a species of holy indignation.'

But Mrs Frederick Enstridge, so far from being appeased by this view of the question, only became more irate—retreated to the door of the apartment, and muttering, I am sorry to add—for



they moved in a good circle, and were uncommonly 'genteel'—the word 'stuff!' banged the afore-mentioned door violently after her; and was so much excited by the intelligence, that she put on her bonnet instanter, and went across Cavendish Square—alone—yes, verily, *solus, cum sola* (but, then, consider the occasion on which this impropriety was committed), to the residence of her cousin, Mrs Lacie, who lived in Henrietta Street; to the end that she might at once impart the astounding information to that most estimable and decorous of gentlewomen.

Truly it was as curious a wooing as ever was enacted, one which promised neither much of peace nor happiness for the future; the disagreements, and trivial bickerings, and eternal arguments, and differences of opinion, had been so incessant, that how anything in the shape of 'love' had ever been reached on either side, might well be considered as something little short of miraculous; but by some means, the proposal was made—and, as we have seen, accepted; Mr Imlach obtained the united consents of Mrs Enstridge and her son; Frances and he were 'engaged,' and then indeed arrived the trying period, then 'came the tug of war.'

Mr Imlach disapproved of theatres; Miss Enstridge liked plays of all things: Mr Imlach was 'serious;' his intended was quite the reverse: the clergyman was devoted to 'missions;' his bride, that was to be, entertained heretical and sceptical opinions on the subject, particularly with regard to Jewish and Foreign ones: Mr Imlach was reserved, yet dogmatical; Frances was most desperately frank and self-willed: he liked a certain *retenu* of manner, particularly in women; she detested anything bordering even in the remotest degree upon what she termed 'nonsense and affectation:' in short, from the colour of a ribbon up to the direct route to Heaven, there was not a subject on which this strangely assorted pair entertained ideas in common; yet Frances Enstridge loved him with a wild, wayward, strangely evinced attachment, which she turned into a perpetual jest; and he—yes he—first admired, and then loved, and then thought it a desirable connection; and then reflected, if in spite of her money he might not have made a more prudent choice; for, as he considered, 'If we disagree so constantly before marriage, what will it be after?'—but here he was

wrong, for Frances never *seemed* anything; with all her faults and absurdities, and whims and peculiarities, he saw her as she was, or perhaps a little worse than she was, for there is an affectation of bluntness which conceals the good qualities of the possessor far more effectually than affectation of a different description covers the bad; nevertheless, Mr Imlach had arrived at the conclusion that Miss Enstridge was a lamentable distance from perfection, when one evening, in compliance with an invitation from the young lady's brother, he entered the drawing-room at Harley Street exactly one half-hour before six o'clock, at which latter period the master of the house regularly returned for dinner.

The reverend gentleman who gravely greeted the sole occupants of the apartment—Mrs Frederick Enstridge and her refractory sister-in-law—was, for a clergyman, in anything rather than a placid or Christian frame of mind, and for this state of affairs there existed two or three very sufficient reasons; first, he and his curate having lately had what Miss Enstridge, to her suitor's inexpressible annoyance, styled a 'Popish difference'—that sanctimonious aspirant to Puseyism had thought fit to publish a tract denouncing all rectors in general and Mr Imlach in particular; this might have been borne, but a vicar, located within three miles of Ilpingden, whose views were of the very lowest Church, had about the same time taken occasion to accuse his 'fellow-labourer' of too strong an affection for Rome; one of the churchwardens had sided with the curate, whilst the other feared Mr De Lisle might be right in his suspicions; a very beautiful horse had died that same morning; a fine Newfoundland dog had unaccountably disappeared; and when, in addition to all these misfortunes, the unhappy gentleman found his intended bride in one of her very strangest tempers, it is little marvel that he groaned in spirit, and considered 'his cup of misfortune full even unto overflowing.'

The ladies had, according to custom, disagreed concerning the merits of a dress which Miss Enstridge admired extremely, and Mrs Frederick pronounced 'barbarous;' and Mr Imlach, immediately after his arrival, being called in as umpire, decided in favour of the latter lady's taste, which decision so irritated Frances that, pettishly flinging the offending silk on the sofa, she exclaimed, in her usual defiant manner,

‘Well, I know nothing which gives me more comfort than to consider we shall carry nothing of our present nature, save its better portion, into eternity with us—it is pleasant to reflect we must be changed before we can find entrance into the next world, for if we were to go there as we are——’

‘Frances!’ ejaculated Mr Imlach, in utter horror.

‘Yes, do take her to task,’ eagerly interposed Mrs Frederick Enstridge, ‘she is perpetually saying such shocking things as that.’

‘I wish,’ said her sister-in-law, ‘you would permit me to finish my sentence—if we were to go there as we are it could scarcely prove a peaceful place; the flesh seems indeed to me so quarrelsome that I often wonder whether the body, after interment, does actually remain at peace, or whether the old stories concerning churchyard battles, waged between white shrouded figures, have not some truth in them.’

‘Hush, hush,’ implored Mr Imlach, ‘this is not right, Frances, indeed it is not. To speak lightly and carelessly of death—our future state—the mysteries of our fallen humanity, and the glorious promises of immortality, is a something which, if not absolutely a crime, at least approaches the character of one—it is bad taste, to say nothing more, to talk so irreverently—may produce much harm—can do no possible good.’

‘I am not talking irreverently,’ she foolishly persisted. ‘I am only saying in solemn seriousness, what I sincerely feel—that it is a comfort to think we shall be altered; and I only wish the transformation could be effected here. How much better, for instance, Lucy and I should get on if she would cease perpetually impugning my taste and tormenting me.’

‘Are you sure there is no need for a change in yourself?’ demanded Mr Imlach sternly.

There was a something in the tone of the question and the manner of him who asked it, that caused a strange passionate choking sensation to arise in Miss Enstridge’s throat, as turning hastily towards him, she inquired, ‘And if there be, what then?’

‘Why, then the sooner the reformation is commenced the better,’ he returned.

‘And do you propose effecting it?’ asked Miss Enstridge.

‘With God’s help, I mean to do so,’ he answered.

Whereupon Mrs Frederick first hid a smile behind her pocket handkerchief, and then looked gravely and encouragingly at the Rector.

It is extremely probable that had this little fracas taken place when she and her intended husband were alone, the affair might have terminated with a laugh, or at most, a half-serious reproof, but Mrs Frederick Enstridge being present, her sister-in-law’s vanity was wounded; and the clergyman felt it incumbent on him to rebuke Frances’ backslidings with more severity than was his wont.

‘Are you aware, sir,’ said Frances, after a brief silence, during which time she had been looking daggers at her sister; ‘are you aware, sir, we are not married?’

‘I am,’ responded he.

‘I asked the question,’ resumed the young lady, ‘because it seemed to me you had forgotten the fact—and now, do you know, I have come to the conclusion that we had better never marry, since it seems you intend to school and control me—who will submit to be schooled or controlled by no one living.’

‘Frances!’ interposed Mrs Frederick.

‘You were ready enough a short time since,’ said her sister, in a voice that, spite of all her efforts to be calm, sounded husky and tremulous, ‘ready enough to speak unkindly and unjustly of me: and Mr Imlach seemed wondrously inclined to believe your tale; but it is better we come to an understanding before it is too late; if we do not consider we can agree after marriage, it would be desirable to part now.’

‘Frances,’ again interposed her sister-in-law, ‘only be patient; you will regret this afterwards—you will.’

‘Pray allow me to proceed,’ interrupted Miss Enstridge impatiently: ‘do you mean to marry me,’ she added, addressing the Rector, ‘with all my faults, as I purposed wedding you with all your faults, intending to bear with them then as now; or do you mean to endeavour to transform me into a model of perfection like my sister-in-law, who has so obligingly opened your eyes to my defects?’

Now there were two things in this speech which annoyed Mr Imlach; first, that Miss Enstridge could even speak of

relinquishing him; and secondly, that she should imply he had a fault, for though he confessed himself, and in the abstract thought himself a fallen sinful creature, yet it was wounding to his vanity to hear such direct straightforward allusion made to the fact, as in the remark just recorded; consequently he replied with some degree of temper, 'that he had little hope of being able to alter Miss Enstridge in any respect, and that doubtless both would have much occasion to "bear and forbear."' "

'If you intend really to "bear and forbear," I desire nothing more; but if you propose to dictate to and reform, and school and torment me, to lay hold of every idle word, and make it a pretext for sermonizing and lecturing—if, in short, you think it probable you will hereafter repent yourself and give me cause to repent, I say it is better we should repent before than after marriage; it is better, in short, we should part now, than wish hereafter we had done so.'

'And I say, madam,' responded Mr Imlach haughtily, 'that it is a question solely for your own consideration.'

'What is a question solely for her own consideration?' demanded Frederick Enstridge, who arrived just in time to finish the business his wife had begun.

'Whether Mr Imlach and I can contrive to live more happily after we are husband and wife than promises to be the case at present,' answered his sister, a deep crimson spot glowing on the top of each cheek.

'Why, what is the meaning of all this?' asked the barrister, glancing in amazement round the group.

'That your sister has changed her mind about marrying me,' said Mr Imlach with a most unclerical sneer.

'You know it is not so,' exclaimed Frances vehemently; 'but I feel positive we shall both regret such a step hereafter, I see you think it; I am not perhaps exactly adapted for a clergyman's wife. God knows I meant to try to do my duty faithfully towards every one of my fellow-creatures, and most especially to my husband if I ever went to the altar, but I do not wish to bring misery on myself for life; I desire to hold no one to a promise or an engagement, entered into perhaps without due thought, perhaps without thought at all.'

'Have you no answer to make, sir?' inquired Frederick, who



felt more for his sister, as Mr Imlach remained silent, than he could have imagined possible.

‘Miss Enstridge was the first to propose breaking off the match,’ replied the clergyman coldly; ‘if she have altered her resolution, I have no desire any more than herself to hold her to a rashly uttered acquiescence.’

‘Do you desire to draw back?’ demanded the barrister.

‘You must address that question to your sister, sir,’ returned Mr Imlach, who would have died rather than implore Frances to yield.

‘Well then, let us part,’ exclaimed she, bursting into tears, which she would have given anything in the world to restrain, for they were tears of grief, though all present save her brother attributed them to anger; ‘let us part—the present pain is nothing—let us part.’

‘As you please,’ said Mr Imlach, taking her at her word, and accordingly on the morrow Mrs Frederick Enstridge announced to her cousin the news, that Frances and Mr Imlach had quarrelled, that the marriage was not to go on, that George Lacie might yet be made independent, and a hundred schemes were revived or formed, on the strength of this abrupt termination of a love story, whilst the heroine thereof wept silently and sadly over the downfall of the pretty country castle she had built for herself; and Mr Imlach first was angry, then became reconciled; and finally, before the tears were well dry on the cheek of the woman he had intended to marry, led to the altar Mr De Lisle’s sister, which union healed all differences between the families, and proved decidedly happier than one with Miss Enstridge could possibly have done.

And on the strength of this event Mr George Lacie, being somewhat shy, his mamma came over in state from Henrietta Street, and offered the hand and heart of her eldest darling to Frances with all due form, to which offer the young lady returned an unqualified refusal.

‘I have made one essay at love-making,’ she said, with a laugh, ‘and that not having proved successful shall give up the attempt for ever;’ whereupon Mrs Lacie turned up her hands and eyes to Heaven, and wondered, ‘what would make her serious, or teach her sense?’

‘Not wedding your son at all events, my dear madam,’



answered Miss Enstridge with a slight sneer, and so the ladies parted, sworn enemies for life.

Years and years passed away, and Frances Enstridge still remained unmarried. Truly it was a light and careless word to have separated two who really had cared for one another; and yet, as she often repeated with a sigh, 'a straw shows how the wind blows;' and undoubtedly both Mr Imlach and she were right to part; it was a present pain, but an ultimate good; yet that one essay was, as the lady herself had said it should be, the last she ever attempted in the matrimonial line. People declared she was heartless, that she had never really cared for him; he knew, and she knew, whether or not they spoke the truth, and yet still he, and she, and every one affirmed both had acted prudently in breaking off the match. Perhaps had they married they might have got on well enough, as we see persons of opposite temperaments and ideas doing every day; perhaps after all Miss Enstridge was correct when she mentally exclaimed, 'I am fifty times happier as I am.'

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## CHAPTER VII.

IMAGINE twelve years turned into the things that have been since Mrs Delorme left behind her for ever the trees, and flowers, and lawns of Stor Court: it is a long step, dear reader, to ask you to take, yet bear with me, for it is necessary for us to reach the pinnacle upon which that length of time stands, ere we can properly review the road along which that lady travelled in the interim. You may then, if you please, walk a couple of miles, English measure, out of the large county town of Orpen, situate as everybody knows in that wildest of England's central counties, Derbyshire—only two miles along the highway—under the shade of fine old beech and elm trees, then turn up a cross lane, and after proceeding for about half a mile in this direction, pause to admire a very tastefully laid out flower-garden, enclosed by a well-trimmed hedge, and entered by a light

iron gate—push it open, our way leads us through the perfumed walks.

For here dwells all that now remains of Selina Zuriel—a wasted creature, a shadow of her former self, but beautiful still, oh! *very* beautiful. How distinctly the blue veins could be traced through the transparent skin—how small, and fine, and chiseled were the exquisite features—from what a pure white brow was the fair hair pushed back—what a bright deceitful hectic flush lighted up the face of the sufferer, with a loveliness born only of consumption—how large and lustrous were the eyes—how thin and slender and emaciated were the hands—little marvel that her child thought each day her mother grew more like an angel; that the colour 'on the cheek deluded the young understanding and made her dream that 'mamma would soon be better—be well before papa returned.'

How the twelve years had passed with the once light-hearted Selina Zuriel may be told in a few sentences. With the sound of a father's curse ringing in her ears she went forth with a new guide from the haunts of her childhood to traverse the world; and if words of kindness and tenderness could have obliterated the memory of her parent's cruel malediction, she might have been happy, for in truth Captain De-lorme, if not a very highly-principled man, was ever a fond and affectionate husband; and Selina clung to him for whom she had relinquished everything with a sort of weak yet passionate devotion—the very sacrifices she had made, and the very sorrow she had endured for his sake, seeming to bind her young heart more closely around him.

During two years she moved about from place to place, now in desolate country quarters with no society save her husband and perhaps a raw young subaltern; again in the bustle and gaiety of a crowded town; and at first the novelty of the life she led, deadened the memory of her father's anger, and besides hope—beautiful, cheering, delusive hope—whispered that he might yet relent. His only daughter, she who had been so much to him, the only surviving one of all—it was impossible he could cast her off for ever; time, which alters most things, *must* alter his decision, she argued, and she lulled her soul into a state of tranquillity by a dream of happy days destined never to come.

Meanwhile, a new interest was created in life—a child was born ; an infant so beautiful, that it was a pride to the mother to call anything so lovely, hers : and in the joy of her heart, she made one more appeal to her father, and waited with what impatience, those who have looked and longed for letters, and sickened and grown faint and sad-hearted because of their non-arrival, best can tell—for his reply.

Too soon ; oh ! far too soon, the answer came in the shape of a cold, cutting epistle from Mr Zuriel's solicitor ; an epistle in which the bitterest expressions were couched (by desire) in the most concise and stinging language, an epistle before which even hope fled vanquished and dismayed, which separated the parent and the child for ever ; which entered the soul of the disobedient daughter with the force and venom of a poisoned dagger. Ah, me ! to think that human beings who stand so much in need of forgiveness themselves, should so fiercely deny it to each other. Had God not been more merciful to men, than men are to frail humanity, how dark a rest the grave would be, uncheered by the light of the Atonement—unilluminated by the Divine radiance which the love and pity of a benignant Saviour flings around the death-bed even of the chief amongst sinners.

Under the crushing weight of her father's unappeasable anger, the heart of his child sank down in the dust of sorrow and repentance, as a tender plant is prostrated by the power and violence of a storm.

Years crept slowly, wearily on : and then another infant—a boy—lived, though only to die in a few days, wept over by his mother, whose health from that hour giving way—disease of the body, thenceforth, aggravated the grief of the mind : and both conjoined to bear the once laughter-loving, light-hearted, dearly-cherished Selina Zuriel to her grave.

Now came the Indian wars, that left a sad desolate track behind them in British mansions and cottages, that made many an English wife a widow, and many a widow son-less ; that caused bitter tears to flow in Highland homes and Irish cabins ; that added a region rich in historic recollection, famed in Eastern story, with its glorious mountains, and holy rivers, and palaces, and mines, and treasures, to the possessions of the brave men of the West ; that gave to the survivors wealth and

fame, to those who fell, immortality and soldiers' graves; and Captain Delorme bade adieu, like many another, to his wife, child, and country, and went to face death or to gain renown in a foreign land.

Ere he departed, he purchased the cottage near Orpen for Selina; fitted it up with every luxury needful for her state of health, and left her amidst Derbyshire's wild and beautiful scenery, as he fondly hoped to recover some portion of the strength, which, for so long a period, had been deserting her.

If happiness were a thing of place, it might have been supposed to dwell in that fairy-like garden amongst the flowers, which, like all other things comprising what we call 'inanimate nature,' seem to share nothing of the 'curse,' excepting decay; but happiness, as we all know, inhabits our own hearts, not our tenements; it passes by the lordliest hall and flits noiselessly into the humblest cabin; it flies from the pure and quiet country to enter the narrow street of a populous town; it is not an attribute of nature, or wealth, or position, or talent, but a condition of mind which may be met with and experienced *even* on this earth of ours; yet Selina Delorme failed to find it in the retreat which her husband's love had provided for her, which was sanctified by the presence of religion, enlivened and graced by the tenderness and affection of a child.

There is not one amongst us who, having been at some time stretched on the bed of sickness, has not thereon turned and tossed, with fevered restlessness, hoping that each new position might give relief; and he who has done so, knows that after the first brief instant, the pain returned with unabated violence. As with bodily distempers, so it is with maladies of the mind; for a short space change of scene, and new faces, may banish the thoughts of sin, sorrow, and bitter grief, that so rapidly undermine the powers of the mind—its elasticity, its peace; but it is only for a space, and the sufferer is soon convinced no earthly change may ever bring more than temporary ease, unless the canker-worm, gnawing in the heart, can be destroyed.

And wherever she dwelt, wherever she wandered, a parent's malediction was ringing always in Mrs Delorme's ear; it was the death knell of peace tolling amidst nature's fairest scenes;

it was the bane of her existence, the trouble of her life, the skeleton in her home.

It is true there is one in every house, but there are varieties even in skeletons, and still greater varieties in the way of encountering them; some are so hideous, that the stoutest-hearted quail before them; the horrors of others are magnified by the weak fears of those inhabiting the mansion in which they have thought fit to take up their abode; whilst some again face these spectres boldly, face them, and fight them, and although perhaps unable to expel them completely from the citadel, contrive at least to keep them within proper bounds, and prevent their occupying every chamber of that place which an Englishman so proudly styles 'his castle.'

Unfortunately Mrs Delorme was neither fitted by nature, education, nor constitution, to bear up against, or battle resolutely with, sorrow, whether real or imaginary; on the contrary, she dwelt upon the memory of her unpardoned disobedience, till the skeleton within her gentle bosom became a terrible vampire, sucking away her life's blood, drop by drop.

She was a weak, amiable, loveable, truly feminine creature, who bore her griefs silently and meekly, who faded away as her mother before her had done by almost imperceptible degrees, and spent her life instilling not merely holy truths, divine doctrines, truthful principles, and honourable purposes into her daughter's mind, but also endeavouring, all unconsciously to herself, to render the child a dreamy, romantic being, unfitted for the every-day bustle and hard, dry, unpoetical, but still most important realities of existence.

But it seemed as if the mind of Dora Delorme were prepared like the stone of the lithographer to receive merely the desirable impressions her parent endeavoured to stamp upon it, and reject all that which might mar in after-times her usefulness to her fellows. We are told there are some plants which will not imbibe more even of the purest water than conduces to their good; and thus, so much, and no more, of her mother's teachings as were beneficial sank down into the soul of her child, refining, purifying, softening, and exalting the nature that was composed of stronger, firmer, more enduring materials than any which ever entered into the formation of the character of the millionaire's daughter.



Even Dora's personal appearance was of a more decided style of beauty than Mrs Delorme's ever had been; the figure, though slight, was not so bending and fragile; the step of ever free and bounding childhood was firmer and steadier than that which had wandered through the grounds and gardens of Stor Court; the fair hair of the mother was, upon the brow of her daughter, shaded into a rich lustrous brown. Dora's eyes were of the deepest, darkest blue, and when she raised the lids, fringed with black lashes, it almost seemed to the beholder as if he were gazing down into the clear depths of some shadowy stream, so tranquil, yet transparent, was the light which lay in those large, frank, lovely orbs.

Her cheek was pale, almost too pale for that of a child—it seemed, indeed, when she and Mrs Delorme sat together as though all colour had been taken from her face to endow that of her parent with a double portion of perishable beauty; but when from exercise or any extraneous cause the blood did rush up, through the clear white skin, it flushed her countenance with that deep carnation which seems so lovely because there is scarcely time to marvel at its exceeding richness ere, like a glow of the evening sun, it is gone, leaving nothing but a memory of admiration and regret behind.

These two then—the dying mother and her young child—together with Emily, the woman who had been waiting-maid to the former in 'the bright days departed,' and an assistant, half butler, half gardener, whole devoted and faithful servant—tenanted the fairy cottage amongst the flowers, from which one—she for whose comfort that place had been purchased—was so soon to depart.

Speedily it dawned upon Dora's understanding that *they two* were not to be very long together; as light falls upon the eyes of the watcher by the bed of sickness, at first darkly, then more faintly, then more clearly, then very distinctly, so did the sickening truth enter the mind of her who was ere long to be left an orphan.

The female attendant on the invalid strove to keep knowledge from the heart of the child, but—I have said that the lady was weak—Mrs Delorme seemed to take a morbid pleasure in speaking of her approaching dissolution, and though she embellished Heaven with all the charms that faith, and hope, and



romance, if it be not profane to make use of such an expression with regard to our future state, could invest it, and by these means robbed the actual dying of half its terrors, yet the idea of the separation preyed, without ceasing, on the child's thoughts, and many a night when Mrs Delorme imagined she slept, the tears were silently coursing down the round smooth cheek, not perhaps at the idea of her mother's going to Heaven, but of her being left behind.

The lady became at first gradually then rapidly worse, soon the garden saw her no more ; there was a vacant chair in the pretty drawing-room, her couch had a constant occupant ; yet welcome news reached even that shaded chamber—Captain Delorme was returning home a Major, on half pay ; and the dying woman waited, as those alone wait who are momentarily expecting a summons to eternity, with an impatience that amounted to agony for his advent, and every hour her lips moved silently, whilst they whispered a prayer that he might come back ; that she might be permitted to see him, if it were only for a second, ere she sought the better land, where greetings are never spoken, because partings are unknown.

One morning in that month when the roses come into bloom, when nature is beheld perpetually in tears and blushes, in the leafy weeping month of June, Dora Delorme stood by the window of her mother's apartment, gazing over the garden, upon which a beam of the morning sun fell brightly, whilst the bees came forth to gather honey from the flowers, still dripping after a shower, and the birds quitted the shelter of the evergreens and firs to welcome with their sweetest strains the return of warmth and brightness.

'Dora,' was the single word uttered by Mrs Delorme, which caused the child to start, and approach the bed, whispering in a low, half-frightened voice that had now become habitual—

'What is it, mamma?'

'A pen, love, and some paper—and—and some ink—I must write ;' and as her daughter left the room to bring the required articles, which for so long had never been wanted, that their very use and existence seemed to be forgotten, the dying lady pressed her hands against her forehead, as though some sad thought or racking pain was distracting her.

‘Another pillow, my child,’ she said, when Dora re-appeared, and the young hands arranged the supports, and assisted to prop up the weak emaciated frame of her parent, as dexterously and tenderly as if she had been twenty instead of not much more than ten; and more quietly and patiently than many a one of fifty might have done, did she sit down beside the bed, and watch without asking a question. Mrs Delorme traced a few words upon sheet after sheet of paper, that were successively cast aside, with a dissatisfied gesture; whilst Dora held the ink bottle, into which nervously and tremulously her mother dipped her pen.

‘No, no,’ exclaimed Mrs Delorme at length, pushing the paper, blotted with tears, from her, as she gave way to an uncontrollable fit of weeping. ‘No, no, he will heed nothing that I can write, nothing—for written words are after all but cold lifeless portraits of our real feelings; when the heart is breaking no sign of its agony ever appears on paper—he would not hear my voice when I knelt at his feet on the steps of my childhood’s home and implored forgiveness there; is it likely he will deal more leniently with a prayer, albeit a last one—written in words of sorrow, it is true, but which is incapable of conveying even a tithe of what I really feel, to his understanding?’

Silence reigned in the chamber, broken only by a woman’s sobs and the half-stifled grief of her child, who wept to see her weep, not because she understood, excepting in part, the source of her sorrow; then Dora drew closer to her mother’s side, and asked in a tremulous voice, ‘Dear mamma, may I, can I do nothing for you?’

‘Yes,’ exclaimed Mrs Delorme, starting up and clasping her tightly to her heart. ‘Yes; you, you shall write to him; perhaps he may lend a more tender ear to the entreaty of the child of his daughter than to his daughter herself. Dear Dora, you shall write; but listen to me first, I will tell you how it came to pass. You are very young to hear it, but take warning by my unhappiness; listen to me, darling;’ and sweeping back, with a loving hand, the rich dark tresses from her daughter’s forehead, and gazing earnestly into those beautiful eyes swimming in tears, the poor dying lady thus began—‘As I love

you, my father loved me. I was his pride, his affection; there was not a thought of my heart he ever refused to gratify—but one; not a wish of my soul he did not anticipate—but one; not a vision of my imagination he did not render a reality—but one; and that one, dear child, I resolved to make a reality for myself. In spite of his commands, in opposition to his will, I carried my point, and therefore for twelve years—think of that, Dora—twelve long years we have never met.’

The weary head fell on her daughter’s shoulder as she spoke these last words, and for a few moments she remained silent: then suddenly raising her eyes to that young frightened face, Mrs Delorme continued—

‘What my disobedience was, it were useless now to tell; great may have been my fault, and great assuredly has been my punishment; but always remember, dear, dear Dora, my words to you; never hesitate to comply in all things with your father’s will, obey him implicitly; I need not tell you to love him and cling to him when I am gone, for I know you will; but no matter what comes to pass, no matter what new friends you may meet with or attachments you may hereafter form, never forget what I tell you—do what he desires. No matter what the sacrifice may prove at the time, it is preferable to repentance afterwards. God knows my life has been a long love, and a long sorrow! which has been the strongest I cannot tell; may He grant your existence may be a brighter and a happier one than mine; and if you remember my injunctions, the shadow that has clouded my joy, and rested on my heart, will never fall upon your soul, my own only darling;’ and once again the loving arms folded Dora close to her bosom, and held her there in a fond embrace till the child whispered softly,

‘Did you not say I was to write, mamma?’

‘Yes, yes, to your grandfather,’ was the reply, ‘take a pen—let me see, what shall you say?’ then after a little silence she added, ‘write what you think yourself, put it in your own way; but make haste that it may go by this post.’

In the splendid library at Stor Court Mr Zuriel received the following note, traced in imperfect characters by the hand of a child; in a shaded chamber where death was hovering, it had been written, and he shivering close to the fire, though the

sun poured his beams into the apartment, first read the few lines it contained and then flung it with impotent rage towards the flame.

It fell upon the hearth and he arose to thrust it between the bars; but something, it may have been a feeling of nature swelling up in his bosom, caused him to refrain from doing so, and straightening the crumpled paper he first read it through once again, and afterwards placed it half hesitatingly in his escritoire.

‘Orpen, June 25th.

‘DEAR GRANDPAPA!

‘My mamma is dying; she is very unhappy because she once disobeyed you, and because you would never forgive her for it, and she bids me write to say she is dying, and that she hopes very much you will pardon her now, and I do hope you will too.

‘Your affectionate grand-daughter,

‘DORA DELORME.’

Oh! the immense expenditure of time and tears and childish thought that note had occasioned, how many a sheet of paper had been wasted, to the end ‘that he might be able to read all the words’—how sadly had the mother smiled through her tears to note the careful hand trying to guide the pen steadily across the page; how terribly distinctly had Dora written the last word, *her* name, the name of *his* grand-daughter, the name of the man whom most on earth he detested.

Because of that one word he cast the letter from him with an oath, and hardened his heart, in his hatred, and his pride against her who had been Selina Zuriel, and was now Selina Delorme; still, still his child.

Oh! that repentance, and pardon, and regret came sooner, how many a heartache it would prevent.

‘It is a scheme,’ he muttered, ‘it is a scheme, she is not dying; why should she die, so young! she is not dying, it is false;’ and though the soul of the old man refused to believe the specious excuse, he imagined it did, and encasing himself

in his iron pride would not confess that the news could be true, and kept ever murmuring 'it is false, it is a scheme, she is not dying.'

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## CHAPTER VIII.

JUNE had wept its last tear over its children, the roses, and July had just arrived to pale their beauty with its fervid heat, when one evening ere twilight had veiled the earth in its mystical shadowy curtain, four post horses whirled a chaise rapidly through the town of Orpen, for a couple of miles along the turnpike road, and then, as the sole occupant of the vehicle exclaimed 'to the right, to the right, and drive quickly,' the post boys turned the sharp corner of the by-road leading to the cottage, sparing in the action neither whip nor oaths, and in five minutes more drew up at the garden gate.

Almost before the conveyance paused, a fine, handsome military man sprung out.

'Mamma, mamma, here is papa!' cried Dora, rushing out to meet him, as the dying woman, raising herself with a desperate effort, and fixing her glazed eyes on the door by which she knew he must enter, murmured in scarcely articulate accents 'At last, at last; my God, I thank Thee!'

'Your mother, darling,' said the officer.

Dora did not answer, but looking wistfully up in his face, tears half blinding her eyes, and pressing close to his side led him towards the death chamber.

He entered it, and the doctor, who chanced to be in attendance, would have stayed the child from following.

'Let me go,' she cried, struggling to free herself from the detaining grasp, 'let me go, she will be here so short a time.'

'Your grief will only distress her,' he urged, in a kind tone, 'come with me, it is no scene for you to witness, poor little creature;' but with a determined effort she released herself,

pushed past him and standing behind the curtains, beheld the meeting and the parting of her parents ; whilst with an attempt at firmness beyond her years, she strove to repress her sobs for fear their sound might disturb her mother and cause her to be sent away from the apartment.

They two! the husband and the wife, the one so lately returned, the other just setting forth on the long solitary journey ; they two spoke the few last words that might ever pass between them.

Oh! those fearful separations which take a portion of our being from us! there were silent pressures of the hands, there were subdued yet not the less passionate exclamations of sorrow, two or three hurried sentences, a long fervent kiss of eternal farewell, and then the mother, with a low moan, suddenly sank back on her pillow.

‘Mamma, mamma, kiss me,’ Dora cried, springing from her concealment upon the bed.

Is it—can it be true, that when the spirit has almost released itself from all earthly bonds—a sudden cry, a scream, a sharp exclamation of horror is capable of calling it back to its former prison-house, to linger there for a brief instant in agony?

I do not know, but she who the moment before seemed dead, rose once more, and clasping her daughter to her heart, kissed her over and over again.

The whole thing occupied but one brief second, the next, with a distorted countenance she fell heavily back, and all had ended.

Dora had seen what no child ought ever to behold, and though thenceforth and for ever there was one less in the world to care for, and love her, one less on the earth for her to bestow her affections upon, yet a gentle spirit had been set free from pain ; there was an angel more in Heaven to watch and bless the footsteps of that girl.

‘Dead!’ it was the sole comment Mr Zuriel ever made concerning the event ; but people noticed that after the tidings of his daughter’s demise entered the old man’s ‘palace,’ his mood became sterner and gloomier even than formerly ; he alternately courted and shunned society, his steps grew more irregular, his hair a few shades grayer, his voice more harsh and unpleasant than ever. ‘Dead,’ he muttered the word by



the open window in the room where he had repulsed him, and spurned her. Amongst the flowers she had tended, on the lawns where her light feet had trod, the old trees which bent their branches over her childish form and over her girlish beauty, heard the desolate parent murmur that solitary word, as, with hands clasped behind his back, he paced the paths and walks where she once wandered. He had permitted the hour of forgiveness to strike unheeded and unimproved; he had sat still cased in his anger and his pride, and let it pass away for ever; it was gone—and life before him lay stretched, like a dark shadowy expanse, for unavailing repentance.

Oh! death is such a break; we may go to the graves of the departed and forgive, or demand forgiveness, but no voice arises from the sod to speak the blessed word; no throbbing heart lies underneath it, to be comforted by those who perhaps caused it misery untold ere it ceased to beat for ever.

Deal gently with the living, dear reader; avoid harsh words; oh! forgive the trespasses of your fellows, that your trespasses may likewise be forgiven; turn not a deaf ear to the voice of him who has done you a wrong, and who repents him of the evil; so that in no after-time you may find bitter reason to mutter, as you pace the city streets, or crush the springing grass beneath your tread, that one word which Mr Zuriel breathed half in anger, half in contrition, as he turned coldly from the magnificence which surrounded him, to think of her whose home had once been there; that one word which reveals all mysteries, finishes existence, solves the enigma of life, which has been spoken of the infant as of the gray-haired man; of the maiden as of the matron; which has fallen like a thunderclap on loving hearts, and been spoken with tearful eyes in tremulous accents; that one word fraught with awful significance—Dead.

Dora Delorme understood now the full meaning of the phrase; and having tasted of the tree of knowledge, wept, as all who taste must weep, at the bitterness of its fruits. A man's stern sorrow, and a woman's deep grief, and a child's wild passionate despair, all dwelt together under one roof for a time.

Only for a time, however, for on the afternoon following Selina's demise a note was placed in Major Delorme's hands. Its contents were none of the longest, and the letters which

formed the words were so stiff and hard and angular, that they looked as though they had been traced on stone with the point of a sword.

The epistle was [from a soldier to] a soldier, from a veteran Colonel, who had commanded the regiment in which, when quite a youth, a raw young ensign, the Major had been indoctrinated with the principles of military tactics and military extravagance. It ran as follows :—

‘The Oaks, Wednesday.

‘DEAR DELORME,

‘I am sorry to hear your pretty wife is dead. I send you some oak to make her coffin; it was grown on this property, and is a portion of a tree I ordered to be cut down and seasoned for my own use. Finding there is more than sufficient left for my purpose, I hope you will accept the accompanying without hesitation, as I know no man living to whom I had rather give it than yourself. You will find the child in the way at present, so I shall tell the boy to drive over for her to-morrow morning at 11 a.m. *precisely*.

‘If I can be of any further service to you, pray command,

‘Yours faithfully,

‘THOMAS LESPARDE.’

‘P.S.—You will find the wood well dried, and in proper order; it has been cut for five years.’

So Major Delorme knew; for just before he departed to India he had seen the Colonel in person superintending the hewing down of the tree, and remembered perfectly that when he demanded his reason for so wantonly felling the mighty oak, his friend had answered—

‘I consider I have as good a right to the Oak as my successor: I want to have it seasoned for my coffin, so that whenever death brings me the marching order from on High, I may have everything ready for an immediate start to that world where, like a true and gallant soldier, I mean to go with a brave face, without any delay, or asking a single question.’

And so a portion of the very tree which he had seen fall some five years before without a thought, save perhaps a gay one, at the old Colonel’s whimsicality, was destined to enclose all that now remained of his once beautiful, dearly-cherished

wife. The officer turned him with a sickening heart from the contemplation of his friend's strange present, though he knew no greater mark of attention or attachment could possibly have been evinced by his former superior towards him.

‘Men take extraordinary methods of showing their affection for one,’ he muttered; but if he did not feel quite so grateful for the gift as Colonel Lesparde imagined would be the case, he certainly did for the offer to relieve him for a period of Dora, with whom, under the circumstances, he really did not know well what to do, being reluctant to send her amongst strangers who could not sympathize with her grief, and feeling that the house of death was no place for her to abide in, any more than all the details connected with an interment were things for her to become acquainted with; and accordingly he wrote, thanking the owner of the Oaks for his present, his sympathy, and, above all, his invitation: the consequence of which note was, that after much remonstrance, many tears, and long but unavailing entreaties to be permitted to remain near her mother, Dora Delorme, on the following morning at ‘11 a.m. precisely,’ found herself seated in Col. Lesparde’s phaeton, under the guardianship of ‘the boy,’ that worthy veteran’s nephew, a tall, handsome young gentleman, aged two-and-twenty, who had been despatched from ‘The Oaks’ with strict instructions to ‘drive slowly,’ but who had nevertheless managed to make the ten miles nil—in something less than forty minutes, and who ruefully turned his horses’ heads homewards, glancing alternately at their smoking flanks and the face of the pale child who was to bear him company back; and who he saw was striving with all her strength to repress her sobs, that ‘she might not annoy him.’

Her efforts were none, however, of the most successful, for ever and anon a burst of uncontrollable weeping would show how full her heart was; full of grief even unto suffocation.

Perhaps there never was a young man yet, unless he chanced to be like the clever children of whom gossips talk, ‘too good to live long,’ who was eminently qualified to play the part of ‘comforter’ with much success to any of his fellows, more especially towards little girls; and Mr Edmund Lesparde being sufficiently remote from perfection to live for ever, felt that he should have been infinitely better pleased had his uncle

sent him on a friendly mission to the Cannibal Isles, than to drive that poor sobbing little orphan to 'The Oaks;' and then, thought he, in a sort of desperation, 'what the deuce are we to do with her when we do get her there?'

There are some persons whom sorrow annoys, but such was not the case with Dora's companion; it made him feel uncomfortable; he did not know how to speak to her, and he did not like to remain silent lest it should seem that he had no sympathy for suffering; and accordingly after many vain attempts at a consolatory speech—all which attempts stuck in his throat and died there—he propounded to Dora, in a very gentle voice, the absurd question of 'why she cried?'

'Because my dear mamma is—dead,' sobbed the little girl, a perfect deluge of tears impeding her utterance of the last word; then noticing, with that quick intuitive quickness which belongs at once to children and dogs, the look of bewilderment and compassion Mr Edmund Lesparde fixed upon her, she added, clasping her hands together, 'And she was *so* beautiful.'

'Was she?' returned he quickly, for Dora had struck by chance on the weakest point in his nature, an unbounded admiration for all things fair to gaze upon, lovely to behold; and as the horses happened to be at the moment ascending a hill (how he had made them fly down it a short time before), he permitted them to fall into a lazy sort of walk, and repeated his question, 'Was she?'

'Oh! yes,' replied Dora, 'just like an angel.'

'And what is an angel?' inquired her companion.

'Emily says it is what my own mamma is now,' answered she simply; and the ice being thus fairly broken between the child and the man, he felt himself competent to offer her some scraps of consolation, such as he recollected having heard spoken by clergymen and others to survivors after a funeral; however, not finding these attempts produce the desired effect of soothing Dora's grief, he speedily abandoned them, and adopted a much simpler plan and one more congenial to his nature, viz., that of talking kindly to the little girl about her mother, and listening patiently whilst she talked, and so permitting a portion of the grief to evaporate in sound.

There is nothing on earth so good for violent sorrow, as letting it take its course either in tears or words; for it is a

beautiful provision of Providence that the more a heavy misfortune is spoken of, the lighter it really becomes—the mouth being a sort of escape valve, by which a part of the suffering is drained away from the heart. Love, pain, pleasure, grief, if much talked of, cease to be, like the beautiful and horrible shapes reflected from the surface of a Venetian mirror; the moment the light of day is permitted to look on the secret, the whole illusion vanishes, and remains but as a memory to be recalled without any great sensation of one sort or another resulting therefrom.

‘Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh.’ Yea, truly, but after a time if the mouth speak much the heart becomes empty; it is only silent sorrow, silent affection, silent friendship which prove enduring, which can withstand the shock of adversity, the lapse of time, the voice of calumny; wherefore it comes that those who profess much, practise little, and those who practise always, profess not at all; and thus strong love, like smooth water, runs deep, with constancy and an abiding attachment, making no show on the surface, indeed, but lying ever tranquilly at the bottom.

It pleased Mr. Edmund Lesparde to see how as she talked Dora’s sobs became less frequent, and her tears, like April showers, only fell at intervals, and accordingly by the time they had entered the avenue at ‘The Oaks,’ he had ceased wondering what they were to do with her, and speculating whether, in the absence of a lady of the house, it would not be justifiable to hand her over for a season to the motherly care of Mrs Spriggins, the housekeeper, who had the happy knack of being able to shed any amount of tears upon every conceivable occasion in life, from a wedding to a funeral, from the acquirement of a fortune to the overboiling of a pan of her choice apricot preserve.

‘Poor dear lamb!’ exclaimed that worthy matron, laying violent hands on the child, and watering her with snuffy tears, and smothering her with wet kisses in token of her sympathy and her great sorrow. ‘Poor dear lamb! and so your poor ’ma is dead; well, it is what we all have to go through once in our lives—mercifully, only once. I lost my ’ma, too, little Miss Dora, but my trouble is past, and so will yours soon be, poor darling; and—and I am sure you must be hungry, and would you



like some bread and jam, or a nice piece of plum cake, poor dear; you must be hungry.'

'Oh! no, no, I am not,' sobbed Dora, struggling to escape, 'I could not eat anything, thank you, Mrs Spriggins,' and she convulsively clutched the hand of Mr Edmund Lesparde, who released her from the grasp of her would-be comforter, and led her off to his uncle's especial sanctum, much to the chagrin of the housekeeper, who would fain have detained the child and moistened her a little more, and changed the character of her sufferings, by making her sick with tarts and cakes *ad libitum*; for it was Mrs Spriggins' unalterable idea that there was no tonic like grief for producing an appetite, and that nothing ever proved so successful a consoler in cases of sorrow, as, what she called, a 'comfortablisth dinner.'

'Uncle,' said Dora's new friend, when he entered Colonel Lesparde's sort of semi-library, where he sat surrounded by plans, and books, and swords, and guns, and pistols; 'Uncle, here is Major Delorme's daughter.'

'Very true!' exclaimed the veteran, rising, and drawing his figure up to its full height, as if on parade; 'Very true! well, my dear, how do you feel yourself?' and he extended a not unkindly hand in a very formal manner to the child, who took it with a very frightened look, and by way of reply to his question held down her head and burst into tears.

'Poor little child—poor little creature!' ejaculated the Colonel; a film obscuring the eyes of him who had fought at Waterloo and looked on plains where men, who had been mowed down by the ruthless hand of Death, lay rigid. 'Poor little Dora! what are we to do with her, Edmund? do you think it would do her any good to talk for a while to Mrs Spriggins, or shall I send over my compliments to Mrs Merton, the rector's wife, and ask her to speak some sort of comfort to the little thing, better than we can do?' and in very perturbation of spirit, the eccentric old man began to cough violently, and to feel that '*only* a child' is about the very heaviest charge any one unacquainted with the habits of thought of the tribe, can possibly impose on himself.

Edmund Lesparde had felt Dora's fingers involuntarily tighten in their grasp of his hand, when his uncle proposed relinquishing her to the tender mercies of the rector's stony wife,



or to the insufferable sympathy of Mrs Spriggins—and this little circumstance possibly influenced his answer.

‘Mrs Merton is a very worthy lady, undoubtedly; and your housekeeper an adept at consolation—but—’

‘But, you do not think either will do here!’ said his uncle, significantly glancing at the pretty downcast, sorrowful face: ‘well, what should you like best yourself, poor little Dora?’ he continued, ‘if there is any one thing or person in the world you think would do you good, you shall have your desire—what should you like best yourself?’

‘To stay with him,’ replied the child, emboldened by the tone of almost feminine gentleness with which the old Colonel addressed her—‘To stay with him,’ and she raised her eyes to the face of her new friend Edmund, for a moment, with so pleading and sad, yet trustful glance, that it quite touched the sympathies of the two beholders, the elder of whom exclaimed—

‘Well, then, that is just what you shall do. Edmund, you will take good care of her, and let her do what she chooses: and if any one vexes or annoys her, only tell me, that’s all; and—and see if you cannot do something to comfort her and that sort of thing, you know: don’t tire her: and you will stop crying, won’t you, little Dora, and give your father’s old friend a kiss before you go?’ whereupon, with about as much ease as though he had been clad in armour, the Colonel stooped down and kissed the trembling lips of the child who was now motherless; after which act, that wonderfully resembled the signing and sealing of a last will and testament, he dismissed his nephew and the orphan, to do ‘what they liked.’

Edmund first led her into the garden, but speedily discovering that somehow flowers and her mother were inseparably connected in Dora’s mind, and that the perfume of the lilies, and the hum of the busy bees, and the sight of the roses, caused tears to stream like rain from the young eyes, he quitted the *parterres* rich in the glorious beauty of summer hues and summer odours, and conducting her through woods—over the quiet hills—across smooth fields where the grass seemed close and soft as velvet, made her at last sit down upon the moss-covered trunk of an old monarch of the woods, and look up at the bright-blue heaven, ‘where,’ murmured Dora, with a sad smile through her tears:—

‘Emily says my dear mamma is with God.’

Altogether, the child’s grief was so great and so perfectly unaffected, and she talked so earnestly and mournfully about her mother, that Mr Edmund Lesparde really began to believe Mrs Delorme must have been something almost equivalent to an angel—this belief being considerably induced by the account the orphan gave of her parent’s beauty, for the Colonel’s nephew leaned to the popular though generally erroneous idea that what is pretty must also of necessity be good—not that I would by any means imply the two qualities are incompatible, but merely that it is a pity the shadow is so often mistaken for the substance.

Thus the summer’s day was spent, and when Dora, wearied with sorrow, lay fast asleep, tears, or rather the traces of them, still on her cheeks, Colonel Lesparde demanded of his nephew—

‘How he and the child got on?’

To which question Edmund responded, ‘Wonderfully, considering: she will be better in a few days. Pray, sir, was Mrs Delorme very handsome?’

‘Not handsome, but lovely,’ was the reply: ‘a fair, fragile, gentle, loving creature, who first ran away with Delorme and married without her father’s consent, and then broke her heart because she had disobeyed him. Ah! yes, it was a sad story, but she is at rest now. Did Delorme say how he liked the oak?’

‘He was delighted with it,’ returned the young man, fervently trusting that the falsehood might be forgiven him.

‘Thought he would,’ said the old officer complacently: ‘nothing like oak for ships, rafters, and coffins; very glad I remembered I had too much for myself. Poor Delorme! yes, I am sure he felt pleased,’ and feeling much pleased with himself Colonel Lesparde went to bed in a very amiable frame of mind, with all kinds of compassionate emotions swelling in his bosom towards his bereaved friend and the little orphan visitor, who remained for three long months at ‘The Oaks,’ where her father frequently came and stayed, and whose tears were dried in that period by Time, the universal soother; and at the end of those thirteen weeks Mr Edmund Lesparde, who was then going abroad, drove her home to the little cottage among the flowers, where her father had taken up his abode, and where

her mother had died; and where she grew up in due course, and changed, in the lapse of years, from a very pretty child to a most lovely and amiable girl.

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## CHAPTER IX.

‘TIME!’ remarked Mrs Frederick Enstridge sententiously, as she sat in council with her robust cousin, Mrs Lacie: ‘time, I verily believe, changes everything but Frances, who only grows more eccentric as she gets older.’

Having concluded which profound observation the lady clasped her hands, and looked hopelessly across Harley Street, that being the portion of London wherein the cousins held solemn conclave together concerning a determination Miss Enstridge had expressed relative to departing from the shadow of her brother’s roof, and seeking a home and a shelter for herself, where, as she said—

‘She fervently trusted she would neither be tormented with man, woman, nor child.’

‘She does not soften, certainly,’ remarked Mrs Lacie, ‘nor does she become, to the best of my observation, much older in appearance, but then she does not look any younger;’ and Mrs Lacie, thinking of her own daughters, sighed, even while she seemed to derive comfort from the idea that, at all events, ‘Miss Enstridge remained *in statu quo*.’

‘Where, my dear, does she propose going?’

‘Oh! I do not know,’ returned the other pettishly: ‘she does not make me her *confidante* you may be sure; but I do wish you or any one could induce her to remain here for a little time at least. Living is so expensive in London, and educating the girls takes a fortune, and Frederick must soon go to college, and servants are a perfect sinking fund, and what she pays is so useful, that—’

‘It is a pity, my love, a thousand pities,’ interrupted Mrs Lacie, ‘that you did not consider these things sooner.’

‘And why, pray, is it a pity I did not consider them sooner?’ demanded Mrs Enstridge, with considerable acerbity, for though the ladies were on terms of the closest friendship they frequently quarrelled. ‘Why is it a pity, and how do you know I have not been considering them for years?’

‘Oh! if you lose your temper, my love——’ commenced Mrs Lacie.

‘I have not lost my temper; I never do lose it,’ retorted Mrs Enstridge; ‘and that reminds me, my dear, that you have lately acquired quite a habit of saying “my love.” I heard you use the expression the other day to Mr Gregory, if I am not greatly mistaken.’

‘I am sure you are *greatly* mistaken,’ said Mrs Lacie grimly.

‘I would not have mentioned the circumstance,’ continued her cousin, unheeding the interruption, ‘had I not felt sure you were unconscious of the habit, and would feel obliged to me for naming it.’

‘Very grateful, my love,’ returned the other, laying a marked and quite resolute accent on the obnoxious words; ‘very grateful, although your kindness is quite uncalled for, and on precisely the same principle I made the remark which irritated you, that it is a matter to be regretted you did not conciliate your sister-in-law earlier; now you need not contradict me,’ added the lady, encasing herself as it were in her opinion and in folds of fat, ‘for if I were to be taken to the stake this minute and burnt there, I should still maintain you might have made what you pleased of Frances Enstridge had you only played your cards properly.’

‘And why,’ demanded her cousin with a touch of very feminine sarcasm; ‘why, when you are so much cleverer than I, and so extremely fascinating, and—and—so much better in every way, did you not manage so to ingratiate yourself with this sister of mine of whom “anything might have been made,” as to get her to say she would marry George and portion the girls—and—and——?’

Mrs Enstridge here breaking off with something like an angry sob, Mrs Lacie responded—

‘Because in the first place you counteracted all my plans——’

‘I!’ gasped Mrs Frederick Enstridge (like the youth who sat ‘by the margin of fair Zurich’s waters,’ it was all she could say), ‘I!’

‘Yes,’ maintained her cousin, ‘and in the next it was George, and not I, who was to marry her, and though the poor dear fellow is my son, yet maternal tenderness cannot blind my womanly judgment to the fact that he is ridiculously shy, a thing with which Frances has, as you know, no patience; and again, I only saw her occasionally for a few minutes at a time at intervals of days together; I don’t wish to say anything harsh, my love, but it always appeared to me you desired to keep us separate. So much for her union with George; and with regard to the girls, they are dowerless I admit, but so, my dear, were you, and they have better portions than money—virtue and amiability—and they might, had such been their desire, ere now have made *splendid* matches, so I shall feel obliged by your never again alluding to my daughters in the disparaging tone which is, I regret to notice (I am sure all unconsciously to yourself), becoming a habit.’

‘And why,’ demanded Mrs Frederick, unheeding the last clause in her cousin’s sentence, ‘did they not make those splendid matches of which you speak?’

‘Because, thank God,’ said Mrs Lacie, turning up her eyes to the chandelier (noticing *en passant* how very dusty it was), and clasping her plump hands together as if about to pray: ‘because, thank God, they love their mother and their own home so much that they cannot tolerate the idea of leaving it.’

Which speech so completely upset Mrs Enstridge’s gravity that she broke into a very sceptical laugh, which was only interrupted by a loud double knock announcing Frances’ return; whereupon the one lady smoothed her brow, and the other composed the muscles of her face into due solemnity as she hurriedly exclaimed—

‘Do not mention the affair unless she names it herself; and do try to be very civil to her.’

‘I will,’ replied Mrs Lacie, with a smile, which meant that with her to try was to succeed, ‘and if she name the matter I will do all I can for you.’

In answer to which Christian speech Mrs Enstridge clasped her hand with cousinly affection, and had just time to drop it

after murmuring to the fat lady, 'That's a dear,' ere Frances, opening the door in an energetic manner, entered the apartment.

She was dressed, like her sister-in-law, in mourning, for Mrs Enstridge, senior, had left behind her for ever the love of son, daughter, and grandchildren, and departed, much lamented, to that distant bourne where sooner or later all must go; wherefore Miss Enstridge, after 'bearing' with her brother's wife for almost nine months, 'out of regard,' so she expressed it, 'to her parent's memory,' had, as previously intimated, declared her intention of finding a new abode for herself. In fact she had just returned from this quest when Mrs Lacie greeted her with a loving pressure of the plump fingers, and a smile which was intended to express how dear unto her very soul was the woman who had refused her son.

'You have been a long time out,' remarked Mrs Enstridge.

'Yes!' replied her sister-in-law.

'Did you find it an agreeable day for walking?' inquired Mrs Lacie, blandly.

'Yes! and for driving,' returned Miss Enstridge, shortly.

'I thought you never patronized cabs?' ventured the mother of her *ci-devant* admirer.

'You were mistaken,' answered the other, 'but the error probably originated in the fact that when I take one it is from necessity, when you hire one it is from gentility; one of the extraordinary ideas entertained by some people in London being, that it is genteel to drive in a cab, even though it be not their own.'

Mrs Lacie coughed here so violently that her affectionate cousin felt constrained to offer her a cayenne lozenge; the truth was the lady felt she had ventured on unsafe ground, and so her next move was quite in an opposite direction.

'Have you seen, Miss Enstridge,' she commenced with tears in her eyes, caused not by the vehemence of her cough, but by the antidote she had thought it *comme il faut* to accept and burn her mouth with: 'Have you seen, Miss Enstridge, the account of that shocking shipwreck in to-day's *Times*?'

'No!' was the reply, 'I have been out all the morning.'

'Well, just do read it when you are at leisure, it is most interesting though so dreadfully melancholy; a vessel going



out with troops to Africa or some place, and it struck on the rocks, and five hundred—let me see—was it fifty or five hundred, I think it was five hundred men went down, never to rise again.’

‘If it had only been the Lord’s will that they had been women!’ responded her auditor.

‘Oh! fie, Miss Enstridge,’ exclaimed Mrs Lacie. ‘I cannot imagine what injury any of your sex can have inflicted upon you to justify or even excuse such a shocking wish.’ Mrs Lacie uttered this reproof in a tone intended to be playful, but the person so addressed answered gravely,

‘I have no *particular* grievance to complain of having received from either man or woman in my passage through life; but holding as I do, that if there are, as some assert, one half too many people in the world, there are assuredly four times too many females, you must not marvel that even from excess of love for the latter I wish there were fewer of them in the world.’

‘Good gracious!’ exclaimed Mrs Lacie, who, although she had heard Miss Enstridge propound a similar doctrine fifty times before, still deemed it proper to seem surprised and horrified when the subject chanced to be introduced. ‘Good gracious! if you had the ruling of these matters what would become of us poor women?’

‘I never,’ resumed Frances, without a change of countenance, ‘hear of a colliery explosion, or of a great battle, or of a disaster at sea, or of any terrible accident in which many men lose their lives, but I think what a curious and unfortunate circumstance it is that no accidents ever occur to kill off in the same wholesale manner some of their wives and daughters.’

‘No accidents,’ interposed Mrs Frederick, ‘why, Frances, you must either be dreaming or have lost your memory; the very last dinner party we had, our cook was nearly burnt to death, and only a short time before that her sister was knocked down by a waggon in Holborn, and had her leg broken, and it is not long since poor little Luey dislocated her arm; and you know, Frances,’ she added impressively, ‘the doctor gave your namesake over when she fell against those dreadful spikes, and cut her head so badly.’

‘Yes,’ replied Miss Enstridge, with a smile, ‘I admit all

that, but still it merely proves what I said before—namely that there are no accidents to kill women; the cook was only “nearly burnt to death;” her sister, to this hour, is walking about Hoxton with the help of a stick, and both your girls recovered, and may yet live to become “ornaments to society,” while, without any conceivable reason, one of your two boys sickened, and before the doctor well knew he was ill, died.’

At which allusion Mrs Enstridge, thinking it proper to draw forth her pocket handkerchief and apply it to her eyes, Mrs Lacie took advantage of the lull to inquire—

‘And why, pray, *should* the girls die?’

‘Why should they not?’ demanded Frances in her turn: ‘why should they live when those who are fitted by nature and educated to battle and jostle with the world are carried off by hundreds and thousands?’

‘Yes; but I would fit them to battle and jostle,’ audaciously replied Mrs Lacie, whereupon Miss Enstridge silenced her by retorting with a withering sneer—

‘How? by teaching them they cannot with propriety cross the thresholds of their homes alone? No, no!’ she added, after a pause, ‘I persist there are too many women in England, and if you want proof see how female labour is paid. Read Thomas Hood’s “Song of the Shirt,” look at the list of servants wanting places in the *Times*, think of all the governesses in search of situations; why, it is not an hour since I was speaking to a widow, who is assisting her income by letting lodgings, and she told me that out of eleven children, five sons and six daughters, six only, and those the latter, are living.

‘So you really, really were looking for lodgings,’ said Mrs. Frederick Enstridge reproachfully, forgetting in her chagrin her previous determination of not adverting to the subject: ‘so you really, really were looking for lodgings, Frances?’

‘Yes, I really was,’ responded her sister-in-law with provoking coolness, ‘and, what is not generally the case with ladies, found that which I sought.’

‘You don’t mean to say—’

‘Yes I do,’ interposed Miss Enstridge, ‘that I have arranged to take the first floor, in the house of the widow previously referred to; four of whose daughters are scattered, as governesses, to the winds of heaven; the others reside with her

—one in the capacity of assistant-general, the other, a confirmed invalid, as an everlasting burden. I am to be both lord and lady of my own apartments; no one is to enter them without my permission; I am, in one word, to be monarch of all I survey, so long as I pay the stipulated sum per annum—free to come and go, be alone, or have society, to talk or sit or walk just as best suits my sovereign will and pleasure.’

‘I am sure!’ exclaimed Mrs Enstridge, ‘you might have had all that here; I would have fitted-up any two rooms in the house just as you desired—I would have relinquished them exclusively to you—I would have given orders that no person should intrude on you excepting when you specially wished it; the children should never have disturbed you—in fact, you could have had all the protection of a brother’s house, with all the advantages you have just enumerated, without leaving us, your nearest relations. Do, *dear* Frances, re-consider the matter, and think well before you decide on taking such a fatal step.’

‘Such a fatal nonsense,’ returned Miss Enstridge, sharply; ‘have I not been considering the question for thirteen years, and, good gracious, is that period not sufficient to enable a sensible person to make up his or her mind on *any* point? If it had been possible, or indeed right, to induce my mother to separate herself from Frederick, I should not for years past have been an inmate of this house, which becomes, now that your girls are growing up, and having masters and learning graces, more intolerable to me every day. My *dear* Lucy, I have made up my mind to go to the widow, and go I will, in spite of fate, or, in other words, spite of remonstrance.’

‘I pry that you may never repent, Frances.’

‘Which means, that you hope I shall be very uncomfortable, and fly back to my brother’s house. Is it not so, sister?’ inquired Miss Enstridge with a smile, which wonderfully resembled a sneer, and belonged indeed to the same family.

‘Am I to understand,’ slowly demanded Mrs Lacie, ‘that you are thinking of leaving Mrs Enstridge’s hospitable roof, and of taking up your abode under that of a stranger?’

‘Did Lucy not tell you before I came in that such was my intention?—*dear* me! I thought she had no secrets from you.’

‘It was *your* secret, not mine,’ equivocated Mrs Enstridge.

‘Nay, no secret,’ replied her sister-in-law, who saw the evasion and despised it; ‘I have a horror of the very name—thinking evil lurks always in hidden places. I told you I meant to leave Harley Street, and did not care if you published the news to all whom it might or might not concern.’

‘Have you considered the step?’ inquired Mrs Lacie.

‘So long, that I am now resolved to take it,’ replied Miss Enstridge.

‘I know you do not value public opinion—but few ladies who *can* reside with relations, ever prefer not doing so,’ suggested Mrs Lacie, mildly.

‘But I *cannot* reside with my relations,’ returned the independent spinster, in a tone that would have subdued any one save Mrs Lacie; ‘if I could, like the ladies to whom you have so vaguely referred, I should not choose to depart from my brother’s house.’

‘If you were leaving it for a home of your own—’ commenced the other.

‘I am leaving it for a home of my own; but you, I suppose, mean if I were going to a home not my own, but my husband’s, to a place where I should not have above half so much free-will or control as in the furnished apartments of the widow who is the happy mother of six daughters; you mean, if I were married, in short, and not an unprotected female as I am, the thing would be all right and proper; but I reply to your thoughts, that though Miss Enstridge still, I am not Miss Enstridge of five and twenty, but of something verging towards forty, and though some people consider the weight of years an encumbrance I do not, since it enables me, even in your ‘set,’ to pass as a maiden oddity, an original, who having journeyed to the wrong side of thirty-five may do precisely what she pleases, and, as they say about stolen property, “no questions asked.”’

Having concluded which energetic speech, Miss Enstridge arose and left the room, ostensibly to take off her bonnet, but really to cut short the discussion, which was becoming too warm and close to be agreeable to any party.

‘Get her to take a house, my love,’ exclaimed Mrs Lacie, the moment the door closed behind Frances: ‘get her to take a house; it would be a convenient place for your daughters to

stay, and if they played their cards well you know she might perhaps adopt one of them, and at all events we could give it out that Frances was to be well portioned by her aunt; those things have a wonderful effect, you know. People take their truth for granted, and as Frederick is living so very extravagantly, and as you have so large a family of girls, you ought to consider the best means to advance their interests; if it were the last piece of advice I was ever to give you, Lucy Enstridge,' she added solemnly, 'get her to take a house.'

Which impressive counsel proved, like most other counsels, more difficult to act upon than to speak, for when Mrs Enstridge hinted to her sister-in-law how much more comfortable she would be in a house of her own, that lady, seeing the motive, and understanding perfectly what influence had been at work, laughed the idea to scorn.

'Take a house,' she repeated, 'to have disputes with the landlord, squabbles with my neighbours, trouble with the servants, to have to give six months' notice before I could leave it, to be pestered with tax-gatherers and collectors, and a string of visitors, to have to furnish twelve rooms when two are sufficient for my requirements; no, thank you, Lucy! I shall try the widow, and if I do not like her, must go somewhere else, and if I can meet with comfort in lodgings nowhere in London, why, sooner than take the cares of housekeeping on me, I will return to you—there now, could I say more? When I am comfortably settled, you and Frederick must come over some evening to Pimlico, and I will give you a cup of the very best tea, and tell you how I like my new quarters.' And with this invitation, which indeed she had not anticipated, Mrs Frederick Enstridge was forced to content herself; and so she abandoned all further attempts to alter her sister-in-law's determination, and meekly aided her arrangements for departure, and her offer of accompanying Miss Enstridge to her new abode being politely declined, bade a truly sad adieu to the spinster, whose money had been so very useful, and beheld her drive off, escorted by her brother, to Pimlico, whither at present we need not follow her, as upon closing this chapter it will be necessary to travel a few years along the road of time, and return once again to the cottage near to Orpen, where Dora De-

lorme still tended the flowers her mother's hands had watered, her mother's eyes had gazed upon in the days of old, when she was but a child, ere Mrs Delorme had become an angel.

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## CHAPTER X.

Who can describe beauty? it is so strange, so inexplicable, so heavenly a thing, that it has always seemed to me too spiritual to be taken to pieces and analyzed in our material language.

The artist can transfer the loveliest face to canvas, and the portrait lives and is admired long after the sweet mouth and kindly eyes have ceased to smile or weep for ever; the master geniuses of fiction in like manner trace characters in ink, and the offspring of their brains, the beings of their imaginations, become real men and women, whose tastes, peculiarities, virtues, and vices, seem more familiar, and whose springs and modes of action are more intelligible, to their readers than those of half the friends, relatives, and acquaintances with whom they hold frequent intercourse. Thus the artist and the author have different vocations, the one to portray and present to observation the outward form, the other to reveal and analyze the inward nature: the first is incompetent to paint, even feebly, a man's secret character, his foibles, his thoughts, his aspirations, on canvas; the last is almost equally powerless to describe the much-talked-of, over-estimated, greatly-admired, variable, perishable, transitory, but oh! most exquisite thing, gift of beauty.

And besides, how different, how widely different are men's interpretations of the word; what one would almost die for love of (if any one ever did die for love of anything), his neighbour does not consider worth the trouble of looking at: one person cannot endure the brightness of sparkling brown eyes; another considers blue should never be seen excepting in children and dolls; whilst a third, contemning the tastes of



both, vows that gray are the orbs which fascinate him, *par excellence*, although he has a *penchant* for black.

One individual admires no nose but one of that piquant description, sneeringly termed 'celestial,' and perhaps his brother pshawes at the very idea, and fixes his gaze on a 'Grecian.' I once knew a person, who declared that feature could not be perfection unless it were a 'gentle Roman,' and so on with all the rest; foreheads, hair, mouths, surely nature meant kindly by us when she decreed there was no one, man, or woman, or child, so plain or so disagreeable but that he or she might meet with some fond eye, and fonder heart, to admire and love that in which others could discern nothing save deformity.

Considering then the fortunate diversity of tastes, which decrees that perhaps by some, even a 'belle' may be deemed ugly, and the difficulty of conveying a correct idea of personal appearance in words, and thinking that in many cases in life, especially in book description, discretion is truly the better part of valour, I feel it more prudent not to dissect the features of Dora Delorme, but contenting myself with asserting she was lovely, shall leave each one of my readers, who may feel so inclined, to conjure up some image of perfection that may best accord with his or her own fancy of the beautiful.

The furniture and general arrangements of an apartment bespeak the character of its occupant fully as much as dress denotes the peculiarities of the wearer, and there was in the drawing-room of the cottage a blending of many traits to be found in the nature of its mistress; a love of refinement; a something verging almost upon indolent luxury was counteracted by a purer and sterner taste, and in the same manner a dress of a colour a Quaker might have worn was made after the most fashionable and becoming mode; whilst the method in which the furniture was disposed bore a not inapt sort of family resemblance to the wreaths of glossy hair wound round and round the well-formed head, most simple, but still tasteful and elegant.

A few choice paintings hung on the wall, gracefully shaped vases contained lilies of the valley, a moss rose—or it might be, some rarer though not more lovely flower; but there was no over-crowding, no pushing in of stem after stem till all became a mass of undistinguishable colour.

There was not a thing out of place in the apartment, nothing which, to borrow an artist's phrase, could have been pronounced 'out of keeping;' the whole room seemed, in fact, to have been furnished and ornamented and decorated to display to greater advantage the pretty girl who stood, one bright summer's morning, talking a few words to her father before she went over to a quiet vicarage, some mile and a half distant, where many an hour of her life was spent.

He was lying on one of the couches: 'he was tired, and had a headache,' he said.

And Dora inquired, 'if he would like her to stay with and read to him, or sing to him,' but he said, 'No, he had rather be alone for a little while, only she must be sure to be back in time for dinner, for he had asked a gentleman—a friend—to join them at that meal;' and accordingly Dora, not noticing how both the words 'gentleman' and 'friend' seemed to stick in his throat, put on her pretty straw hat—oh! those lovely straw hats! that make one always think of hay-fields, and country sights and sounds; those dear old straw hats! that seem so much more suitable to waving woods and clustering honeysuckles, and trailing roses, and the shade of a jasmine porch, than the detestable little bonnets—or rather caps—of these days. Well, Dora Delorme put on her simple becoming straw hat, and went away through a wood across the fields to the old-fashioned vicarage, whilst the father remained at home—a worse pain than headache—that of heartache, distracting him.

For the mode in which he had thought fit to spend the seven years that had elapsed since his wife's death, was one conducive neither to the health of body nor mind, nor calculated to advance in the remotest degree his temporal or eternal interests; but no whisper, not even the lightest, ever reached Dora's ear of how her father passed his time during his frequent absences from the cottage, and to her if to no one else on earth he seemed perfect still. He had squandered all his patrimony, the very cottage was mortgaged; he gambled, and at first won considerably, but fortune changed and then he lost far more; he betted at races, but the horse he backed never after a brief period gained; he had exhausted all his resources, he really did not know where to turn nor what to do: for five hundred pounds it was absolutely necessary for him to raise by some

means or other before another week passed by, to liquidate one of those debts which are styled 'debts of honour.'

Had he owed a similar amount to a butcher or a baker, Major Delorme's mind would have been wonderfully easy concerning the matter, but as a *gentleman*, he felt himself constrained to hand over the sum, without further delay, to the Honourable Captain Ermington, quartered at Orpen, who had won the aforesaid five hundred pounds from him, just when Major Delorme thought fortune was going to smile upon him, and relieve him, by a lucky *coup*, from all his embarrassments.

There is no spur to the invention like poverty—nothing rubs up and brightens the memory like that awful sand-paper 'adversity'—nothing so speedily converts an acquaintance into a friend, as the fact that he can assist; nothing so rapidly induces you to consider a friend an enemy, as the circumstance that he declines to be of service to you, and upon this principle, it suddenly dawned upon the Major's comprehension, that an old schoolfellow of his, residing at a village four miles from Orpen, might help him in his present dilemma; whilst, at the same time, he arrived at the conclusion that Edmund Lesparde was a conceited, heartless coxcomb—'which indeed,' he added, 'I always thought him.' And because the last-named gentleman had declined lending the Major five hundred pounds, he despatched a polite invitation to

'Conroy Bradshaw, Esq.,

'Moorfield,

'Braxleigh,'

inviting him to dinner, which invitation his former schoolfellow joyfully accepted; for though Major Delorme had virtually ignored his very existence for years, and although he knew perfectly well 'Delorme wanted something, or he never would have asked him to his house;' yet if the saying be true, and, in this instance, unquestionably it was, 'that the boy is father to the man,' there never existed on earth an individual more given to meanness and cringing than Conroy Bradshaw; who would scarcely have resented the greatest injury, providing always that the person who inflicted that injury upon him was a man of gentle birth, moving in 'good society.'

He had been the only son, though not the only child, of a rich distiller, whose sole accomplishments, beyond those of

reading, writing, and arithmetic, consisting in being able to make a fortune, was naturally anxious (feeling his own deficiencies) to give his boy 'the best education money could buy,' as he phrased it; but despite that money can accomplish almost anything, it will never give brains to those Nature has decreed shall live and die without them; therefore, while Master Conroy Bradshaw, at thirteen years of age, displayed an alacrity quite amazing in devouring tarts and sweetmeats, he evinced none of those qualities considered necessary to the attainment of any great success in life.

The boy, in addition to being a little gourmand, was also penurious to a degree, consequently he commenced a sort of trade at school by selling to his companions so many of the good things his too fond mother sent to her darling, as he found it absolutely impossible to eat himself.

He started also as usurer, lending out his pocket money at fifty per cent. for the shortest time, in other words, if a boy borrowed fourpence on the strength of his next week's allowance Conroy demanded, ay, and obtained, sixpence when that allowance came, and such was the extravagance of the juvenile community, that he added half-crown to half-crown rapidly, and possibly might have in time amassed a small fortune, had not one lad, whose ideas of justice were scandalized by the proceedings of the little miser, revealed the state of affairs to the principal, who after having with due form investigated the matter, deliberated thereupon, and ordered Conroy not merely to cease practices which were, so the worthy man affirmed, 'calculated to bring discredit to himself, his parents, his instructors, and his country,' but also to refund the greater portion of the money he had extorted from his companions.

Arthur Auguste Delorme, his senior by two or three years, contrived by some means to ingratiate himself in what, for want of a better expression, might be called the boy's heart—perhaps he effected this by the principle on which spaniels become attached to those who beat them, for scarcely a day passed on which Conroy Bradshaw did not receive some decided and violent mark of attention from his friend; but Delorme, always short of money, paid any interest for the accommodation of a loan without a scruple (though he delighted to thrash the

miser as a kind of balance), besides which he was of an old family—a ‘gentleman’—and next to his love of gold, the strongest trait Conroy inherited from his worthy parent was a reverence for and cringing to rank, for Mr Bradshaw, senior, would almost have gone on his knees for a nod or a ‘how do you do, Bradshaw,’ from Lord Nayton, the ‘grand man’ of the county town of Orpen, nigh unto which the distiller had made his money and reared his son.

These characteristics increased as the boy grew to manhood; stingy towards others, prodigal to himself, he advanced into middle age deserted by all save those who courted him for the sake of what he possessed, and if these chanced to be poor or vulgar, he spurned them off, clinging in his turn to the skirts of men better born, but more needy than himself, who, when he had served their purpose, cast him off, and left him wallowing in the mire of his own servile selfishness.

Such then was the interesting individual, who, about five o’clock on that summer’s afternoon found himself passing the white gate leading to the vicarage, when Dora Delorme emerged therefrom, and without even so much as casting a look on the stranger, rapidly crossed the road, and entered one of those pleasant English by-paths, that lead through fields, and woods, over stiles—home. Yes, the stranger always feels they must terminate in some sweet rural cottage that is home to somebody, though not indeed to him.

‘Uncommonly handsome girl,’ ejaculated Mr Bradshaw, pausing as though he had been transfixed. ‘I have a few minutes to spare; just see who she is;’ and accordingly away he went, pursuing the same path as that along which Dora was speeding.

Did you ever see a person in great haste without feeling a great desire to follow him, and know what all the excitement was about? Did you ever find a difficulty in overtaking any individual, without exerting yourself ten times more, to effect your object? If you did, if you answer no—you and Conroy Bradshaw would never have agreed; for he loved to learn all the ins and outs of everybody’s business, and hated to be what he called ‘done’ by any one.

And so when Dora reached the first stile, he was there likewise, terribly out of breath, it is true, but never thinking



about that, as he stared at the pretty face half shaded and wholly beautified by the straw hat previously referred to.

‘You seem in a hurry, Miss,’ said he in a conciliatory tone, by way of ‘opening the pleadings.’

The young lady so addressed had learnt in her childhood that polite axiom, nursery maids, governesses, and schoolmistresses impress on the mind of their charges by the words, ‘always answer when you are spoken to, my dear;’ but as there are occasions on which it is convenient to forget even the lore of the nursery and the school-room, she did not reply, but contenting herself with glancing up for a moment at Mr Bradshaw, spake, like the bridegroom in young Lochinvar, ‘never a word.’

‘Humph,’ muttered Conroy to himself, ‘confoundedly shy or haughty—wonder who she is,’ and walking still close after her he cogitated what form of words, or expression, might be most likely to move the proud beauty to speech.

‘It is a very fine day,’ he remarked.

Still he waited in vain for a reply.

‘’Pon my word,’ he exclaimed, after another dreary pause, ‘you do walk quickly; it is as much as I can do to keep up with you.’

‘I really do not see,’ said Dora, provoked out of her previous plan of indignant silence, ‘I really do not see why if I chance to be in a hurry *you* should walk as fast as I,’ and as she spoke she quickened her pace, until, as Mr Bradshaw internally ejaculated, ‘it was deucedly like a run.’

‘Well!’ he replied, ‘I don’t know, I might happen to be in a hurry too, might not I?’

Dora neither admitted nor denied the truth of this proposition, unless no answer could be construed into an affirmative.

‘I really am afraid, young lady, you will do yourself harm, walking at such a rate,’ he continued. ‘Hang the girl,’ he muttered, as the light feet moved only faster, in acknowledgment of his remonstrance.

‘Can you tell me who lives there,’ he demanded, pointing to a clump of trees in the distance, behind which lay Major Delorme’s cottage. If Dora had not spoken once he really would have imagined she was deaf and dumb, so mute did she remain to all his remarks and questions,



‘You cannot have far to go,’ he at length said, ‘for you could not possibly keep up for any time at *this* pace;’ which observation caused Dora to pause so suddenly, that not expecting any stop he shot by her a step or two, almost before he was conscious she had been left behind.

‘Oh! you need not stop now,’ he said, with a smile, which perfectly distorted his face, ‘you need not stop now, you were in a hurry a little while since.’

‘I shall choose my own pace, sir,’ returned Dora, without reference to you; ‘may I beg that you will go on.’

‘Nay,’ he replied, with another grin, ‘I could not think of walking on, and leaving a lady behind.’

He thought he had never before seen anything so handsome as Dora, who, swelling with indignation and vexation, the rich carnation colouring her usually pale cheek and lighting up her eyes, stood gazing angrily at him, whilst he admiringly contemplated her.

‘If you stay here,’ she said at length in a tremulous voice, but with a desperate effort at calmness, ‘if you stay here, I will go on; if you go on, I will stay here.’

‘Now listen to my proposition,’ he returned, ‘if you go on, I will go on, if you stay here, why so will I.’

‘Is it any pleasure to you, sir, to annoy me?’ inquired Dora, almost crying, as she perceived she either must go on and show him where she lived, or else go back to the vicarage, when she ought to be at home. ‘Is it any pleasure to you, sir, to annoy me?’

‘No!’ he returned, ‘but it is a pleasure to me to look at you.’

Which remark caused the young lady to draw herself up, as he subsequently said, ‘like a tragedy queen,’ and exclaim with considerable temper—

‘Will you oblige me by either going on, or turning back; I wish to be alone.’

‘Well, that’s a pity,’ he retorted, ‘for it is a wish which at present I do not desire to gratify; oh! you mean to go on, do you?’ he added, perceiving Dora once again moving along the path.

‘How soon shall I get to Orpen?’ he demanded, after a short pause.

‘Oh! never unless you turn,’ she eagerly answered; ‘that is the way to Orpen—this path only leads to—’

‘Where?’ asked he.

‘Nowhere in particular,’ she replied, coldly, seeing her hopes had deceived her.

In a few minutes more, they reached a small pond, bordered by willows, on one side of which lay a wood. There were water-lilies growing over the surface, and Dora paused, and grasping firmly by one of the trees, endeavoured to reach the flowers; it was merely a ruse to get rid of her companion, but she seemed so intent to gather a few of the blossoms, and appeared so disappointed to find they were too far off to be pulled, that Conroy, who carried a stick, and spied an inviting bunch, gallantly offered to obtain them for her.

‘Should you like me to get a few?’ he asked.

‘Oh, if you please,’ she answered; and so her admirer went to work, and by the help of time, patience, and above all, the strength and length of his arm, managed ere long to secure the prize.

‘Here they are,’ he said, triumphantly turning, with the intention of presenting them to the young lady, but, like the Irish *leprachaun*, the moment he had taken his eyes from her face, she had vanished.

‘Eh! how is this?’ demanded Mr Bradshaw of the landscape; but it was incapable of enlightening him, and he was forced to arrive at the provoking conclusion, that he and the lilies were alone!

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## CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Mr Conroy Bradshaw, very much tired, very warm, and very angry, entered the drawing-room where Major De-lorme greeted him, he found that gentleman alone, for Dora, immediately on her return, had retired to her own apartment,

to the end that she might change her dress and appear in a proper toilette when her father's 'friend' should arrive.

For it was the very first friend, excepting indeed Colonel Lesparde and the vicar, her parent had ever asked to the cottage to dinner, and, independently of that little vanity, or rather, amiable weakness, which is shared in common by men and women, of wishing to look as well as she could, Dora imagined her father would wish her to be becomingly dressed, for he had always been desperately particular concerning her appearance whenever, in the days of her very young girlhood, the owner of 'The Oaks' had driven over to taste some of Delorme's excellent wine.

That kind-hearted, though eccentric old man, had for many a long day been quietly slumbering in his oaken coffin, but still it was not unnatural for her to conclude that if her father wished her to look her very best when one friend came, he would also desire that she should do the same again on the occasion of a visit from another: wherefore, assisted by Emily, who considered the child whom she once nursed had grown up into something as nearly approaching perfection as was to be found anywhere out of Heaven, she speedily arranged her hair and dress and descended to the drawing-room, a few minutes after Mr Bradshaw had entered it, looking, as her former nurse thought, 'just like a seraph.'

She was pale enough to have passed for a marble statue when she opened the door, but a flush suffused her cheek, and mounted even to her very temples, as she recognized in her father's friend the individual who had caused her some annoyance so short a time previously.

'So she is his daughter, is she,' thought Conroy, bowing profoundly in answer to Miss Delorme's silent curtsey, 'and I am sure portionless; wonder if he have asked me here wanting to get a rich husband for her; dare say he would be very glad to have her off his hands; married, disposed of, and that sort of thing; and if that is what he does wish I do not think I should have any objection; for though they say he is confoundedly poor, she is uncommonly handsome.'

Having concluded which modest soliloquy Mr Bradshaw found himself in a condition to conduct Dora into the dining-

room, where the young lady felt she had rather have gone with a red Indian, than with the extraordinarily common individual whom for some unexplained, and to her inexplicable, reason, her father had thought fit to invite to the house.

Oh! that interminable dinner, which seemed ten times longer than any meal she ever previously remembered; how thankful she felt to get away, to leave that insufferable Mr Bradshaw and her father together: and oh! how trebly thankful the latter felt to find his friend in a perfectly angelic temper; so amiably disposed, in fact, that he imagined he would lend him five hundred pounds without more trouble accruing to either party than that caused by the one writing a cheque for the amount, and the other signing an I.O.U. by way of acknowledgment.

For a time, however, he never alluded to his pecuniary wants; he spoke of the county, of politics, of the notables of Orpen, of their former school days; but at length, when he thought wine and conversation must have lulled Mr Bradshaw into a state of lamb-like innocence and unsuspectingness, he most adroitly (so he at least imagined) introduced the subject of his pecuniary difficulties, and endeavoured with all the eloquence of which he was master to soften Conroy Bradshaw's heart, and by consequence open his purse-strings.

But that gentleman, though he might not be perfectly sober, was assuredly not, to borrow one of his own peculiarly refined expressions, 'asleep;' and so he followed his friend through all the windings of his discourse (discovering *en route* to his infinite chagrin that it was to borrow money, not to get rid of his daughter, the Major had asked him to dinner), until, as he mentally phrased it, 'he had run him to cover;' when pushing back his chair a little from the table, and crossing his legs, and balancing his wine-glass in a manner which would have thrown a nervous house-wife into a fever of alarm for its safety, he, like Carolan, 'his lay began.'

'So in plain words, Delorme, you are deucedly hard up?'

His host reddened a little as he replied—'I am labouring under a temporary embarrassment.'

'Which means that you would give something to have five notes for one hundred pounds each, in your pocket, at this minute?' continued Mr Bradshaw.

‘That amount would be very useful to me, certainly,’ answered the other.

‘Well: and suppose I had a spare half-thousand,’ observed Mr Bradshaw, who liked to speak of money wholesale, and to dispense it in the very smallest retail packages; ‘suppose I had a spare half-thousand which I did not see any particularly profitable mode of investing just at present; which, in fact, I saw no reason to refuse lending you at a reasonable percentage, what security would you give me that the said sum should be repaid?’

‘I will of course hand you over an acknowledgment of the debt, the moment it is contracted,’ said Major Delorme, beginning to feel very doubtful concerning the success of his application.

‘What sort of an acknowledgment?’ demanded his visitor.

‘There are different sorts,’ returned Major Delorme, a little pettishly, ‘in use amongst different grades of society, and amongst different classes of men—now, for instance, this amount is due by me to the Honourable Captain Ermington, and he has nothing more than *my word* for the repayment of it; others are more particular, however; and I will give you a written admission that you have lent me the sum, in any form you please, either as a letter or an I.O.U.—or—’

‘Thank you,’ drily interposed Mr Bradshaw, who, in a question of money, was not to be overcome either by the mention of an Honourable, or by a quiet sneer. ‘Thank you: but you understand I am a plain business man, and like to see *my way*—your word, no doubt, is a most excellent thing in *its way*, but it would not procure me five hundred pence, how much less pounds, at the end of six months if you were to die in the interim—don’t look angry; I am only stating facts and truths, which wise men, you know it is said, never object to hear. Very well, your word won’t do; and I do not see much good in a letter—nor for that matter, in an I.O.U. neither.’

‘Why,’ exclaimed Major Delorme, ‘either of those would enable you to come on my property, if I were dead and buried to-morrow.’

‘Perhaps so; but suppose there was no property to come on?’ suggested Mr Bradshaw.

‘What do you mean, sir?’ demanded Major Delorme fiercely.

‘Just what I say,’ responded Conroy, with imperturbable calmness; ‘if you have no property how can I recover my money?’

‘But I have property,’ gasped the Major.

‘Oh! then that entirely alters the aspect of affairs,’ returned his visitor, in a tone of such serene calmness, that it quite threw the Major off his guard.

‘Then you *will* lend me the sum I want,’ he said eagerly; ‘I can surely repay it in three months at latest, and—’

‘Stop—stop!’ interposed Mr Bradshaw; ‘I should like to know something more about the property of which you speak, before we go any further. It cannot be the place you inherited from your father, for that, I remember, you first mortgaged, and subsequently sold, years ago: or indeed, I believe, it was sold for you—it cannot be that!’

Major Delorme bit his lip, but answered—

‘No; the last acre of the land, which was in our family for centuries, has passed into the possession of strangers—you are quite right, *that* place was sold some years since.’

‘Very well,’ pursued Mr Bradshaw, ‘then it cannot be this house?’

‘Why not?’ demanded his host, nervously.

‘Because I know John Holmes has a mortgage on it for something more than I think it worth.’

Major Delorme remained silent; he felt as if some one had struck him a dreadful blow: to find that a fellow like this knew all about his affairs as well, or even better, than he did himself, was galling to his pride, his dignity, and his self-love; but he would not quarrel with him if he could help it—the man stood in a degree between him and ruin; he would bear yet a little longer; and accordingly, having arrived at this determination, when Mr Bradshaw demanded—

‘Well, have you any other property?’ he answered.

‘Why, yes; there are my personal effects and so forth.’

‘If you mean the furniture, I should not like to advance money on it.’

‘Well, there is my half-pay—it shall be remitted to you instead of to me till the debt is liquidated; will that satisfy you?’

‘No,’ replied Conroy Bradshaw, Esquire, draining off the



contents of his wine-glass as he came to the last article in the inventory of his friend's effects and found all wanting. 'No—because though that might do well enough whilst you lived, you see you might not live, and then I could only whistle for my money.'

How low had poverty brought the officer when, after a moment's consideration, he condescended to reply,

'I might insure my life.'

'And how should I force you to pay the premium?' asked Mr Bradshaw.

'I could give you security that I would do so.'

'Nice security indeed,' retorted the other contemptuously.

'Or, as the premium is small, you could pay it yourself,' suggested Major Delorme.

'And ultimately lose twice five hundred by the transaction. No, no, I like to see my way, and I don't think there is any way here, for you have to my knowledge no property worth speaking of, and are, moreover, deeply in debt.'

'Then I understand you refuse to accommodate me on any terms,' said the Major, in a bitter tone.

'No; I did not say that,' returned Mr Bradshaw, pouring out another glass of wine, and, fortifying himself therewith. 'I did not say that.'

'Well, if you meant it, it comes to the same thing in the end.'

'I neither said nor meant it,' vouchsafed Mr Bradshaw, to the immense relief of Major Delorme, who thought he saw a ray of hope streaming over the polished surface of the dining-table.

There was silence for a few minutes, during which time the guest ruminated what to say, and how to say it; and the host muttered 'I will let him propose his own terms, and they must be hard indeed if I do not agree to them.'

Expecting to hear some monetary proposition, great indeed was Major Delorme's astonishment when Mr Bradshaw finally burst forth with—'Delorme, your daughter is a very handsome girl.'

'What in the world has my daughter to do with lending me five hundred pounds?' inquired the parent; 'that was the last question we were discussing.'

‘Was it?’ returned his visitor absently. ‘Oh, yes! so I believe; but still, Delorme, she is very handsome.’

‘Well, I think Dora is rather good-looking,’ said her father, wondering when Mr Bradshaw would come back to the point.

‘I suppose you are very fond of her, ain’t you?’ observed the other.

‘Are not parents generally fond of their children?’ demanded Major Delorme, with a forced smile.

‘Humph! not always,’ was the reply, ‘many of them seem to think they cannot be got rid of fast enough. I expect you wish her to marry well?’

‘Really I have never thought about the matter,’ responded his host coldly, for he by no means relished the turn the conversation had taken, and the sneer of incredulity he saw curling Mr Bradshaw’s lips as he made the above reply, angered him almost beyond endurance.

‘But now that my question *has* made you think about the matter, don’t you wish she may marry well?’ persisted Conroy.

‘Mr Bradshaw,’ said Major Delorme sternly, ‘I do not know what right or title the fact of my requiring five hundred pounds gives you or any man to ask me impertinent questions. May I request you to dismiss my daughter altogether from our conversation, and to state explicitly at once whether or not you intend advancing me the amount, of which unhappily I stand in need?’

‘Miss Delorme—’ commenced Mr Bradshaw.

‘I did not invite you here, sir—’ commenced the officer furiously.

‘No; I know you did not invite me here to speak of your daughter or any one else, but to see if you could not wring five hundred pounds out of me. Seal my tongue about her or other people, and I have done with your affairs; let me say my say out, and perhaps you may get what you want;’ and Mr Bradshaw having concluded this decisive speech, leaned back in his chair and stuffed his hands into his pockets in a manner which somehow recalled to the Major’s memory *that* day when Mr Zuriel, jingling sovereigns, refused to give him the hand of the fair Selina.

‘You see,’ continued the man of money after a pause, addressing the man of birth with an air of almost contemptu-

ous superiority, 'you see I never interrupted your talk about the money, and I think it is only fair you should listen to what I want to say without cutting me so short; hanging me—ay, and perhaps yourself too, as it were—without the benefit of judge or jury; and, indeed, for that matter, a dying speech and confession.'

'What in Heaven's name are you driving at?' demanded the Major, fairly distracted between his pride, his affection, and his embarrassments.

'If you will only listen to me I will tell you,' replied the other.

'Go on then,' said the officer.

'You must promise to hear me out.'

'I will try,' compromised Major Delorme, and thus encouraged, Mr Bradshaw commenced:

'You want a certain sum of money, in fact you must obtain it in order to pay off a debt of honour, and request me as a sort of last shift to lend it you; I do not approve of the only security you can offer, and think I should be an utter madman to throw away such an amount for no conceivable advantage to myself. Thus the case stands at present, does it not?'

His host nodded an affirmative.

'But,' resumed Mr Bradshaw, 'although in a business point of view, and as a business man, I consider it a folly to fling away so many hundreds, yet if you ask me as a friend to advance the amount, perhaps I might not decline.'

'I do not precisely understand,' remarked Major Delorme.

'I will explain. In consideration of old times, and—and some other circumstances, I may probably not object to risking the loss of this money——'

'Then you really will give it after all,' exclaimed the officer; 'you are a better fellow than I ever thought you, Bradshaw.'

'Gold is a wonderful talisman for opening the perceptions of men to the good qualities of its possessor,' returned that gentleman with a diabolical sneer; 'but now I suppose that if I did this for you, you would not object to humouring me a little; nobody now-a-days does anything without expecting something by way of return, and you will not find me unreasonable.'

'Anything I could do,' commenced the host.

‘Yes, yes, to “prove your gratitude,” et cetera, et cetera, I know the phrase off by heart, and its meaning too,’ interrupted Mr Bradshaw. ‘The worldly meaning of the sentence is, if it suit me to prove my gratitude, I will; if it don’t I won’t, but fling him to Jericho when he has served my turn; but, as I said before, you will not find me unreasonable—in the first place, you would not scruple to ask me to dinner occasionally?’

‘No,’ returned Major Delorme after a moment of hesitation, during which he had reflected he could ask the fellow to dine with him at some hotel, or at his lodgings in town; ‘no, but you are not dreaming, I suppose, of taking the value of your money out altogether in first and second courses?’

‘No, nor yet in your claret, good though it may be.’

‘Do you want me to introduce you?’ demanded the Major, thinking he had got on the right trail at last, and remembering Conroy’s well-known predilection for good society, ‘do you want me to introduce you?’

‘To Captain Ermington, and the rest of your set of “nobs”?’ no, thank you,’ retorted Conroy, wincing a little under the officer’s tone of patronage, ‘to be fleeced, and robbed, and laughed at; pretty introduction truly, presented by a bankrupt, to the men who have ruined him; no, Major Delorme, I do not want to be introduced to any one; please to allow me to go on from point to point at my leisure. You agree to the dinners, very well; now suppose that in time, you know in time, recollect I do not commit myself, or promise anything, it is merely an imaginary case, which leaves me at perfect liberty; suppose that hereafter I thought of marrying, and should happen to choose your daughter, you would guarantee her consent, wouldn’t you?’

It was the excess of the impudence of this speech, and of the rage which it inspired in his bosom, that induced Major Delorme to permit his visitor to finish.

‘Good God!’ he exclaimed, starting up from his chair, ‘you cannot seriously mean this?’

‘And why should I not?’ returned the other coolly: ‘the girl is handsome, to be sure, but she has not a shilling, and everybody knows how her grandfather made his money; and all I have to say is, you may think yourself very safe, and so may she, if she ever get one half so good an offer again: serious,

indeed! I'd be very glad to know why she should not marry me?'

'Because I had rather see her in her grave,' thundered forth the officer, striking the table violently with his clenched hand—perhaps he felt as if it were Mr Bradshaw and not mahogany. 'Gracious heavens! Dora, my Dora, wife to *you!*'

'Your Dora will probably make a much worse thing of it, Delorme,' remarked her interesting suitor. 'As I said before, and as I think still, she has a very pretty face; but you know, as well as I, how long that lasts, and how little the commodity beauty fetches in the matrimonial market. She is no wonder of the world though she is handsome, and—'

'If you do not cease talking of her, by the Lord, I will make you,' broke in Major Delorme.

'Bless my soul! what a fuss about a pale-faced girl,' sneered Mr Bradshaw, who felt more disappointed than he cared to confess. 'Sit down, Delorme, I will give you half-an-hour to cool, and then we can discuss the matter quietly.'

'May I beg of you, sir, to leave my house?' said the officer fiercely.

'You may beg if you like, but I won't do it,' responded the visitor. 'You asked me here to suit your own convenience, and I am resolved to stay here to suit mine;' and he forthwith drew his chair closer to the table, and planted his feet firmly on the carpet to show that go he would not.

'You are my guest,' said Major Delorme, 'and consequently I cannot turn you out.'

'Come—that itself is a comfort,' interposed Mr Bradshaw.

'But when I request you to leave my house I do not think you can remain in it,' pursued the other in a choking voice.

'That's your notion, is it?' retorted Mr Bradshaw; 'well, it's not mine. I wish you would just cease talking for a few minutes, and compose yourself; I have something further to say when you are in a state to hear it.'

'If I had not unhappily *asked* you here,' continued Major Delorme, 'you should not occupy your present seat another minute.'

The guest laughed contemptuously. 'You might get the worst of it even in hand to hand work,' he replied. 'Well, Delorme, I must remark I think you are an idiot to fly into

such a rage about nothing, particularly as you stand so much in need of assistance.'

'Not from you—not from you,' replied the Major. 'I had rather blow my brains out than borrow a sovereign from you now.'

'See your daughter in her grave—blow your brains out,' repeated Mr Bradshaw sneeringly—'strong expressions truly, yet I should not like to tempt you with the offer of the afore-said sovereign if I did not wish you to take it.'

'Will you relieve me of your presence?' gasped his host.

'No,' returned the visitor; 'and now I will let you into a secret. I had a conversation with your daughter about an hour before I came here, and I really do not think she would be averse to—to taking a rich husband like myself. Now suppose—'

But before he had time to develope this last supposition, a violent hand was laid on his throat, and ere he had recovered from his surprise, or even thought of resistance, Major Delorme had dragged him to the hall door; opened it, flung him out, and closed it for ever upon him.

'Dear papa, what has happened?' inquired Dora, coming trembling out of the drawing-room at the time.

'Nothing, at least, that is, nothing for you to know,' he answered, flinging his arms round her, and kissing her fondly. 'Dora, dear, dear child, will you forgive me?'

'Papa,' she whispered, 'you will not ask that man here again; I do not like him.'

Whereupon Major Delorme ground out so frightful a malediction against Mr Bradshaw, that his daughter drew back in terror.

'Let us have some coffee, child,' he said, noticing the movement; 'we will talk of this matter no more.'

## CHAPTER XII.

ONE of the startling speeches, wherewith, in the days when Miss Frances Enstridge was engaged to the Reverend Henry



Imlach, she had astounded and alarmed that worthy divine, chanced to be to the effect, that if 'Herod had only killed the female infants, there would have been no character, ancient or modern, for whom she would have felt a similar respect; in fact, that he had just missed being considered a benefactor to the human race.'

Mr Imlach had pronounced the idea shocking in the extreme; whereupon Miss Enstridge resolutely returned, 'it was an opinion she should always maintain,' and as she was a lady who would have died sooner than have yielded any point even the most trivial or absurd, she did through life retain a sort of half-regretful admiration for the king, who had so nearly come up to her notion of the heroic and useful.

Moreover not being one of those individuals, the rough points of whose characters can be rubbed smoother with the action of time, and mixture with their fellows; the deep lines, and peculiarities, which rendered her even in childhood eccentric, only deepened and grew stronger as she advanced in life, until, in fine, she became that most undesirable of all things, 'an oddity.'

For the very fact of having acquired the name of 'original,' lessens the usefulness of either man or woman in no ordinary degree; no matter what good is done, or principle sustained, or real truth advanced by such an one. 'Oh! 'tis only a whim,' sufficiently explains the matter to the comprehension of most, and the good loses half its effect: the principle is called a crotchet, and the truth is not thought a truth worth thinking about, because he, or she, is 'so eccentric.'

Persons who desire to attain the unenviable distinction of 'peculiarity,' might do well to think of this, and also to remember that they doom themselves to a sort of isolation, for no one ever approaches the ground which they occupy apart from their fellows, with a perfectly unaffected manner; without in short assuming a something, without thinking it necessary to seem unnatural, out of compliment to the eccentric individual from whom, by acting a little, he hopes to gain what he has come to them for. Oddities like geniuses generally make themselves and others unhappy: will anything compensate for the loss of those best gifts from God—the power of cheering the hearts of the loved and the suffering, of rendering home some-

thing almost akin to Heaven, of entwining the affections of young and old around you—of causing the tears of the mourner to cease—of making sad faces beam with pleasure. When any one casts from him sympathy and confidence, and assumes a peculiarity which perhaps he does not feel, and which may be after all merely a manner, he relinquishes, foolishly and blindly, that which he will regret subsequently with tears of bitterness.

Miss Enstridge affirmed that Lucy, her sister-in-law, had provoked her into originality, and of a truth the ideas entertained by the coterie to which Mrs Frederick Enstridge had somehow become attached, might have in many respects annoyed a much more patient person than the independent maiden lady, who after having, as she phrased it, 'borne till she could bear no longer,' had departed from Harley Street, and taken up her quarters at Pimlico.

Perhaps if Mrs Frederick Enstridge had been possessed of sufficient brains to enable her to tell her story connectedly and sensibly, she might have revealed the existence of many faults on both sides; of want of forbearance, of irritability, of sarcasm, of a determined lack of sympathy on the part of Frances; and an immense scarcity of sense, and tact, and heart on her own: in fact, as Frederick Enstridge confessed with a sigh, 'my wife and sister cannot somehow agree; why it is so, or what is the cause, or which is the most to blame, or whether it is the fault of either, and not a natural and constitutional difference and want of sympathy, I confess myself unable to tell.'

And he was a barrister who ought at the expiration of thirteen years to have been competent one would think to give an opinion. Frances said, 'Lucy would provoke a saint,' and Lucy declared 'Frances was not a saint but an original with a very bad temper, who was always finding fault with the children, and her, and her cousin, and who could never agree with any one.'

Mrs Enstridge, who was, as can only be considered natural, fond of her daughter, said 'she thought the fault must lie with Lucy, but still she did not know exactly why that should be either, because Lucy was always kind and pleasant towards her; and the good gentle lady died and was gathered to her fathers

without arriving at a satisfactory solution of the puzzling enigma which was every day presented for her consideration.

After Miss Enstridge left the fraternal roof, her brother's wife declared she was sure 'she would quarrel with "four stone walls" if she had nothing else to quarrel with;' but here she was mistaken, for Frances reigned peacefully in solitary greatness over the 'widow's first floor,' until one of the governesses, thinking fit to marry and come to reside with her parent, irritated that excitable lady, 'just when she was beginning to feel herself comfortable,' with the introduction of a poor sickly little baby, who cried, as is the wont of babies, from morning until night, ay, and what was even worse, from night until morning.

'If it were a boy I could forgive it,' said Miss Enstridge to the grandmother, 'for then I should know that as a man cannot with propriety cry, it was getting all its sobbing done now; but women, you know, must weep, they are forced to do it; and why in the world the creature cannot be quiet now, and let other people have some quiet, it is beyond me to tell.'

'Bless its little heart! it is teething, poor darling,' explained the widow.

'And bless my heart, it has been teething ever since it was born, if teething be the nursery meaning for crying,' retorted Miss Enstridge.

'I am sorry, madam, it annoys you so much,' said the lady deprecatingly.

'And so am I,' responded her lodger; 'now, do you not think you could manage to make it stop screaming?'

'It is very ill, ma'am, and——'

'The malady has not affected its lungs at all events,' replied Miss Enstridge, flouncing out of the house where peace for her was not, and inwardly wishing that children like plants could only be reared at nurseries in the country, in which case she would never have gone beyond cab drive of St Paul's. .

Somewhat soothed by her walk, she returned home, but as she re-ascended the stairs to her privileged apartments, she encountered the young mother carrying her puling infant in her arms.

‘So this is the child, is it?’ demanded Miss Enstridge, pausing for a moment, and surveying it through her eye-glass, as if the latter had been a microscope, **and** the former some curious insect presented for her consideration; and, indeed, it was no wonder she marvelled to note the diminutive proportions of the creature who was nevertheless capable of making such a noise. ‘So this is the child, is it?’

‘Yes,’ replied the parent, kissing it by way of parenthesis.

‘It has not been very well,’ remarked Miss Enstridge.

‘*Very* ill—it *is* very ill!’ said the other, half-reproachfully, half-entreatingly; for she wondered how any one could dislike to hear the child scream—and she wanted to claim suffrage for its shrieks.

‘Well, do you think it will soon get better; get over—what do you call it—teething, and stop crying?’

‘I am afraid, ma’am, it is dying,’ returned the poor mother, her eyes filling with tears as she spoke, and looking wistfully in the little face that had ‘suffering’ written upon it, in unmistakable characters—‘I am afraid it is dying!’

Miss Enstridge removed her glass for a moment from her eye, and looked at the mother—she was not without a certain feeling of sympathy and compassion for her: but as it had become a principle with the spinster never to evince any emotion of any kind on any occasion, she permitted no sign of her sympathy to appear; and resuming her microscopic inspection of the infant, answered before she entered the apartment—

‘It’s a girl; is not it? ah! well—you need not be uneasy, for she is *sure* to live.’

And although the widow’s daughter considered this remark a most unfeeling one at the time, it subsequently turned out to be perfectly correct, for the child did not die, but lived to add, as Miss Enstridge said, another sad face to those already upon the earth.

Some two or three hours after the above dialogue, John, Mr Enstridge’s footman, arrived in a state of breathless alarm, to request that gentleman’s sister to repair at once to Harley Street.

‘Why, what’s the matter?’ demanded the spinster.

‘Please, ma’am, don’t lose any time—my master—’

'My brother!' gasped Miss Enstridge, positively turning pale—ghastly pale. 'He is not dead; surely he cannot be dead?'

'No, madam: but—'

'Well, never mind—get a cab,' returned Miss Enstridge, not waiting to hear his explanation; and in a few minutes after he had informed her a cab was waiting, she had reached the house in Harley Street, where the first person she encountered, was her sister-in-law, bathed in tears, and almost incapable of giving a connected reply to Miss Enstridge's hurried question of—

'In Heaven's name, Lucy, what has happened?'

'Oh! I cannot tell—I do not know,' sobbed forth the other.

'Then what on earth is the use of you?' retorted Miss Enstridge, pushing rapidly past her, up the stairs, to the room where her brother lay dying.

There were doctors in attendance; Frances looked in their grave faces as they bent over their patient; she saw how matters stood at a glance, and a film dimmed the accustomed keenness of her gray eyes, as laying a hand on the arm of one of the medical men, she asked—

'Is there hope?'

The person so addressed turned and looked in her face ere he replied—

'You need not be afraid of telling me,' she said, in a hard, cold tone; and thinking the heart of one who spoke thus was equally hard and cold, he answered straightforwardly—

'I fear not!'

'God's will be done!' said the spinster, with a strange swelling in her breast, and choking in her throat; and she sat herself down by the bed-side and silently took the hand of him who never spake again.

Through the long watches of the night, she never moved from her post, excepting to assist the doctors or to follow some of their directions with regard to Mr Enstridge, whom it was beyond their skill to cure; and they who had deemed her so cold and unfeeling, gradually came to understand, that there is a deep and silent grief which yet interferes with the discharge of no duty, and turns with no horror from the sight of suffer-



ing; that there is a sorrow without tears—a love without profession.

Oh! the bitterness which was condensed into those few hours—the thoughts of former times that passed silently through the soul of the sister; the silent agony which never was revealed by word or tear.

Back to the days when they two had been so much to each other the busy mind returned, when children together they shared the affection of their father and were cherished by their mother; when sitting side by side they planned how Frederick was to become a something wonderful, and Frances was to live with him always.

Memories of the sad partings when he and she went from home to different schools; of the loving letters they, the brother and the sister, had sent to each other; of how when their father died they had met sorrowfully once again in the old place, and gone hand in hand to look upon him as he lay in his coffin; of how they had both repaired to their mother's dressing-room and tried to comfort her; of how they had all vowed never to separate, but to live together always—memories soft, sweet, sad, tender; memories of the days and the faces, and the visions and the dreams, and the loves of old came sweeping through the mind of the spinster, and made her feel a child again.

There was a bitter recollection, too, of how the news of her brother's approaching marriage had made her very soul sicken within her. He had been her pride; she had watched with loving eyes his progress, taken the paper containing his first speech from her mother's hands and read it through tears caused by sisterly affection and admiration; she had been equally fond of him as her mother, but the two women were of different natures, and so their love was different also. The one could bear no change, nothing altered from what it had ever been; she did not like the wife he had chosen, she felt angry to think that from thenceforth she should now be nearer, dearer to him than his sister: the other felt pleased to see her son happy; she would still be near him; she thought his bride pretty, gentle, amiable. The mother never made an objection to the match, while Frances vehemently exclaimed, 'Why, if you must marry, can you not choose some one more sensible,



more worthy of you, than that little silly, stupid, crying, laughing Lucy Luton.'

Then the first angry words that ever passed between them ensued, words that Frances never forgot nor forgave, because they had been caused, most innocently it is true, by *her*.

After that succeeded years of annoyance and irritation, of alternate disagreements and coldness, of being sought for her money, of endeavours to drive her into marrying some, of efforts to prevent her marrying others; of discord following peace, of an uncomfortable home succeeding one which had been happiness itself. Then came her mother's death, her own departure from the house, visits at rare intervals from her brother, who would sometimes go to her lodgings pale, and tired, and careworn, and as if he were glad of the rest and the quiet that he found there—during these visits he talked as he had been wont to talk in the happy days of old, confidentially and affectionately: then succeeded anxiety about his health, for she saw he was overworking himself—he confessed his expenses were enormous, though he refused to accept assistance from her till he absolutely required it—the sudden shock, the sight of his death-like face—he was lying then before her—the cherished brother of former years, dearer now unto her heart than ever—he was dying. He could not speak to her; but occasionally his hand faintly pressed hers; thus the long night was spent—when morning broke, he was dead.

The last relative or friend whom she much loved had passed from earth, the promise of their youth—happiness to both—had never been fulfilled—this was the end of all.

To him a manhood of struggle, anxiety, harass, debt, embarrassment, concluded by a sudden death; to her years of little happiness, much disappointment, and finally a dreadful break, which left her altogether without interest, or care, or thought, or wish in life.

Such were the reflections that passed through the mind of Frances Enstridge, as she gazed in the white face of him who had been her brother. Brother and sister—how near a tie it is, how sacred, how pure, how holy! how easily some can break it; yet how closely it ought to bind the hearts of those who have shared the love of the same parents, the shelter of the same roof, who have been educated together, worshipped in the

same church, read the same books, gazed on the same landscapes, who have all old memories to unite and soften their affections—how strong a link it should be, how little it is ever thought of till it has ceased to be for ever.

Tears fell on the face of the corpse as the sister bent over it; they were the first Frances Enstridge had shed for many years.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

ON the morning after her brother's funeral, Miss Enstridge entered without ceremony her sister-in-law's dressing-room, where the widow, notwithstanding her great sorrow, was engaged in trying on a number of caps which Miss Turner (from Madame Durantz) produced out of a band-box, in order to see which was the most becoming, or, to speak more correctly, which was the least ugly.

Miss Turner was a very elegant young creature, with a waist which could readily be encircled by a ribbon measuring—so she declared—not quite eighteen inches. She generally dressed rather gaily; but on the present, out of compliment to the melancholy event, had 'subdued her colours a little.' She had been for many years, 'since childhood,' she said, 'head milliner at Madame Durantz,' where she acquired that finished politeness of manner and skill in her 'profession' which endeared her to the hearts of the ladies composing Mrs Lacie's select circle; who after she had quarrelled with Madame Durantz, and started an opposite establishment for herself, on economical principles, came to the conclusion, that Miss Turner was 'quite a superior person for her station, who had been scandalously treated by that extravagant wretch,' and whom it consequently devolved upon them to patronize.

And, accordingly, when Mrs Frederick Enstridge exclaimed, in a voice choked with sobs, to her cousin—'Where am I to get those horrid caps?—for I suppose I *must* wear them,' Mrs Lacie returned—'I will send Miss Turner to you, my love; she is a most respectable young person: makes all sorts of millinery

up in the most fashionable style, and is, moreover, strictly moderate and conscientious in her charges:’ and, obedient to the word of command, the exemplary young *modiste* drove to Harley Street.

On the plate-glass windows of Miss Turner’s *Magazin des Modes*, were inscribed the words—‘*Ici on parle Français*’—and a similar piece of information was printed on her circulars: but as the milliner’s ‘French’ consisted solely of a few words picked up during the course of her fifteen years’ sojourn with Madame Durantz (who was herself an Englishwoman married to a German), it is fervently to be hoped that no unhappy native of ‘*la belle France*’ was ever beguiled by the tempting advertisement to enter a shop, where everything was a swindle, from the ‘knowledge’ of languages up to the quality of the ‘real’ Valenciennes lace.

But, as the ladies liked cheapness and fashion, and as Miss Turner could not afford to give them the latter under cost price, she deluded them into ‘patronizing’ her, with a voice so gentle, and a manner so plausible, that you really would have wondered why she did not charge the fair creatures so much per head for a visit to her establishment.

‘Is it not provoking,’ said Mrs Enstridge, addressing this individual; ‘is it not provoking that I must give up curls? wearing my hair plain always made me look a perfect fright!’ and the lady indignantly removed one mourning head-dress from its position and tried on another.

‘I had never the pleasure, madam, of seeing your hair arranged in ringlets,’ responded Miss Turner, shaking her own, and glancing askance at herself in a neighbouring mirror; ‘but I think nothing could be more becoming to you than the Madonna style: braids are so chaste, so classical; they accord so admirably with the contour of your profile, and suit to perfection the general tristeness of your countenance.’

Upon the strength of which delicate and beautiful speech, touching, as it did, on the very edge of her bereavement, Mrs Frederick Enstridge sighed heavily, and tried on another cap.

‘Now, madam,’ exclaimed Miss Turner, enthusiastically clasping her hands together, and surveying the widow with mute admiration, or at least with a look which was intended to express such: ‘now, madam, that is your style; I am not

saying so to induce you to buy; if it came from any other establishment in town; if it were from Madame Durantz', and I am sure I have no right to speak favourably of her, but if it came from her establishment instead of my own, I should still say, purchase it. That cap becomes you, madam, it is elegant without pretension, simple, yet not homely; suits you to perfection, and yet looks as if you had put it on without thinking whether it did or not. It is a lady's cap, madam; will you allow me to make half-a-dozen of that shape for you?'

But here Miss Enstridge's sharp cough, which like herself was short and irritable, prevented Mrs Enstridge replying, for the new-made widow started at the sound, and turned, with a somewhat guilty expression of countenance, towards her late husband's sister.

'I am disturbing you, I see,' remarked that lady sardonically.

'Not in the least; I—I was just seeing—'

'Which of these was the prettiest,' interrupted Miss Enstridge, glancing contemptuously at the caps.

'No, no, my dear, not at all; I was only selecting some mourning; and—and you know these things *must* be attended to,' said Mrs Frederick deprecatingly.

'Of course,' assented her sister-in-law, muttering savagely *sotto voce*, 'One need not look a fright because he's dead.'

'Ah! madam,' exclaimed Miss Turner, 'it is fortunate for gentlemen on these melancholy occasions; they have not to harass their feelings with such details; it is fortunate for them.'

'And for those who have no feelings,' added Miss Enstridge, who continued, addressing her sister, 'If you are likely soon to be disengaged I wish to speak to you.'

'Oh! I shall be free directly,' replied the widow. 'Just tell me which of these caps you like the best, which should you wish me to buy; do you think this one would do?'

'No, I don't,' returned Miss Enstridge shortly.

'Well, do you know, I considered it very suitable,' said Mrs Frederick.

'It is in very truth a sweet cap,' pleaded Miss Turner.

'Sweet nonsense!' retorted the spinster indignantly, 'a thing to express grief covered over with bows and knots, and flying off the head, and——'

'You will observe' remarked Miss Turner with much dig-

nity, 'that there are broad hems on all the bows and lappets, making it the very *deepest* mourning.'

'And so you would reduce sorrow to a thing of broad hems, not of sad hearts,' retorted Miss Enstridge. 'I consider fashionable mourning a mere farce, a gigantic hypocrisy.'

'Then, madam, would you do away with black altogether?' inquired Miss Turner, veiling the impertinence she dared not openly express under a simplicity that never belonged to her.

'No,' replied Miss Enstridge, 'but I would have those alone wear it who feel that in their souls the type of which they put on their bodies. I would do away with and expose half the heartless hypocrisy I see around me, and not doom those who *have* feeling to listen to discussions concerning the respective merits of paramatta and bombazine, muslin, tartan, and net, when their hearts are breaking to think of the corpse that has just been carried from the house.'

Here Mrs Frederick Enstridge began to shed tears, the very mention of death always making her do so, whilst Miss Turner maintained a dignified silence.

'No,' resumed Miss Enstridge, 'if you *must* take one of these things it should be this,' and she lifted out of the box one of the very quietest and ugliest of the caps—one in fact which the widow and the milliner had rejected as being far too plain for a lady.

'It—it does not fit me,' was the fib which stole glibly enough from the tongue of the widow, whilst Miss Turner exclaimed in a tone of contemptuous pity for the spinster's taste, 'That, madam—it is so *outré*.'

'*Ou-tré*,' repeated Miss Enstridge, with a withering sneer, 'and pray what does that matter? but,' she added, 'it is you, Lucy, and not I, who are to buy this widow's apparel—all I ask is that you choose it quickly, for I wish to speak with you before leaving here.'

And accordingly an order was given for half-a-dozen flimsy and expensive caps, for a pretty bonnet, with a *very* deep fall, for a dress trimmed with the orthodox amount of crape, for a handsome mantle and the best Dundee gloves, for a jet brooch and chain, which ornaments Miss Turner supplied at one-third less than the jewellers' prices, and which her customers never suspected to be glass, whereon she cleared two hundred per



cent.—and so on, and the rest of the mourning required for the children—as to the servants, Mrs Frederick said, ‘if she provided the materials they could have them made up themselves,’ and at last Miss Turner curtsied herself to the door, whence, addressing Miss Enstridge, she inquired ‘if there were nothing she could do for her?’

‘I have ordered my mourning,’ replied that lady shortly.

‘I would execute the most trivial command at the very shortest notice,’ said the milliner in her most insinuating tone.

‘Thank you, I do not require anything,’ was the response.

‘Perhaps, madam, you would permit me to send over a few bonnets and mantles on approbation,’ pursued Miss Turner, but Miss Enstridge retorted ‘No!’ in so decided and emphatic a manner, that the disciple of Madame Durantz was fain to beat a retreat, sneering alike at patroness and sister-in-law—at the lady who purchased from her, and the lady who would not.

‘And now, Lucy,’ commenced Miss Enstridge, the moment the door closed behind Miss Turner’s graceful person, ‘and now, Lucy, before going to my lodgings again, I want clearly to understand what you mean to do.’

‘Oh! Frances,’ exclaimed her sister-in-law, commencing to cry, ‘do not, do not, I implore you, harass me with such questions at present.’

‘I am sorry to annoy you,’ continued Miss Enstridge, ‘but——’

‘I really am not in a state of mind to discuss business matters,’ pleaded the widow.

‘I wish you would make an exertion,’ replied the other; ‘believe me, you will find it only a degree more difficult than to decide which of all Miss Turner’s “sweet” bonnets is the “sweetest.”’

‘You are most unfeeling,’ retorted Mrs Frederick; ‘because you have no sensibility yourself, you think every one else must be stone too; if your brother’s death cannot produce any impression on you, remember that others are not so hardened.’

‘God, who reads all hearts, knows which of us has grieved the most concerning that event which has left your children orphans. No doubt many, seeing you weep and my eyes tearless, would think your sorrow great and mine little. Some have



a knack of showing distress, I have not ; but neither can a childish sort of fear and dread of death, and a surface grief, deceive me. You are perfectly able to talk about your future plans ; I know you have thought about them.'

'Oh ! Frances, have you no pity for, no sympathy with me : Consider how lately I have been left a widow ; how—'

'I consider you are competent to answer a straightforward question, but I do not wish you to annoy yourself,' returned Miss Enstridge coldly : 'all I mean to say is this, that if you will not speak to me of your future plans now, I shall not feel inclined to listen to them at a subsequent time, so take your choice.'

The widow looked up with a very bitter expression of countenance as her sister-in-law spoke, but remained silent.

'I do not desire to press the matter on you,' continued Miss Enstridge : 'all I clearly wish you to understand is, that I am not going to supply you with the means to live in London, and spend some hundreds a year uselessly on the education of your daughters, and keep up this establishment ; and, in one word, pursue the same extravagant course which you have done for years past.'

'I never asked you,' returned Mrs Frederick sullenly.

'No ; but your cousin did,' said the spinster : 'at least, she hinted to me that it would be desirable we should all live together in Harley Street ; and that I should contribute something, which meant all,\* towards the maintenance of the family, and adopt one or two of the children, and—'

'And will you do nothing for us ?' demanded the widow, astonished into a natural tone of voice : 'and will you do *nothing* for us ?'

'I shall certainly not spend my income to enable you to live in Harley Street,' replied her sister-in-law.

'And what am I to do ?' returned Mrs Enstridge.

'Whatever you please, except depend on me,' was the reply ; 'for years past, I have thought the expenditure of this household something frightful ; and had I not vowed never to interfere between man and wife, I should long ago have remonstrated with him on the subject.'

'But if you will not assist us, what can we do ?' pleaded the widow ; 'Frederick's affairs are, I understand, in the most

dreadful confusion—I have no money. *Dear Frances, do come, and let us live all together—we shall be so happy!*'

'No, Lucy: you and I can never be happy under the same roof; and I want you clearly to understand, that I *will not* reside with you, or devote all my income, and perhaps my capital, to enable you to keep up this house; and I am not going to educate the girls fashionably, or to assist in bringing them out.'

'Only consider, Frances, they are just entering life: it will be such a blight to them.'

'Not to be enabled to maintain a false position until they can get indifferent husbands. No, Lucy, I will second no such deception; had you died instead of Frederick, I should have adopted them; as the case stands, I mean to leave them entirely in your hands—to control and train up in your own exemplary fashion.'

Mrs Frederick Enstridge remained sullenly mute. Here was a downfall of the castle she and Mrs Lacie had raised a day or two before. She knew perfectly well when Miss Enstridge said a thing she meant it. So there was a long pause, at the expiration of which, she said once again, as if thinking aloud:—'Well, but then, what are we to do?'

'If you like to go home to your father and live quietly and sensibly with him,' returned Miss Enstridge, 'I will assist you to any reasonable extent. Have a governess for the girls, or send them to a rational school, and I am ready to pay the expense—second all the nonsense I have seen about them for some time past, I will not; but if you go away from London to the old vicarage where Frederick first saw you, I have no objection, indeed, have every desire, to assist my brother's family. I know you and Mrs Lacie had arranged matters differently, but as it was necessary for me to give or withhold my consent at some time or other, I thought it best to let you know my intentions immediately, so that you might not be incurring debts on the strength of my supposed liberality, or rather insanity. If you stay in London, you must stay on your own resources; if you leave it and adopt any sensible plan for the future, I will help you to carry it out.'

'And poor Fred!' gasped Mrs Enstridge.

'I will find the money necessary for him to pass through

college and enter some profession—for a fine gentleman, like George Lacie, a conceited, selfish being, whose mother is always looking out for a rich wife for him, nephew of mine shall never be, if I can prevent it. I have made up my mind how I shall act, and leave you to do the same;’ and, accordingly, Miss Enstridge departed, as she said she would, to permit her sister-in-law to come to some definite conclusion on the subject.

Which she did—assisted by the invaluable Mrs Lacie; who though much grieved by the downfall of the vision she had dwelt upon ever since Frederick Enstridge’s death, said—

‘Do what she wishes by all means; it will please her now, and perhaps may induce her hereafter to do more for you. You know for a couple of years at all events you could not with propriety have had much society, and perhaps at the expiration of that time—who knows—’

Which being interpreted, and found to mean that probably then Mrs Enstridge might be able to return to London, that lady was comforted, and signified her acquiescence to the spinster, who was graciously pleased to approve thereof, and three months after the house in Harley Street was vacated, and the furniture and effects sold, and the barrister’s debts paid, and the widow left the beloved London streets behind her, and went away with her children to ‘rusticate,’ as Mrs Lacie expressed it, amid the flat dreary Suffolk scenery, in one of the ugliest portions of which Mr Luton’s vicarage was situated. Thither Lucy Enstridge and her daughters went, and there her gray-haired father greeted them.

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## CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Mr Conroy Bradshaw roused himself from sleep on the morning following his interview with Major Delorme, his first feeling was one of unqualified indignation, hatred, and annoyance; but with thought came calmness; he was a man whom no repulse dismayed, no defeated daunted, and

firmly believing that to the 'brave all things are possible,' and that moreover 'money could gain everything but Heaven,' he determined to make yet another effort to win the hand of Miss Dora Delorme; ay, and what was more, succeed in his endeavour.

Now this determination was arrived at during the process of shaving. Whether it was that the reflection of his own countenance reminded him by some inexplicable process of reasoning or untraceable association of ideas of the beautiful face he had seen on the preceding day; or that the vision of Miss Delorme's loveliness had been so indelibly stamped on his soul, as to be visible to his mental vision, whilst his outward eyes were gazing on himself, it is not very easy to ascertain: one thing, however, is positive—he never ceased thinking about that young lady from the moment when his senses awoke to the consciousness of morning—love, and a breakfast in perspective, until he descended to the parlour, where that last-mentioned meal was awaiting his advent, presided over and graced by his eldest sister, the feminine genius of his castle.

Who being left a widow with two children, and the very slenderest jointure, had thankfully accepted his offer of 'letting her live with him.' Heaven knows the bread she eat under his roof was watered with tears of bitterness, and seasoned with words of sarcasm and unkindness; but what will not women do for the sake of their children and a home? They would die for the former; if the secret motives of the heart were laid bare it would be found—alas! that it should be so—many marry solely for the latter. And for the love she bore her two sons, and for the sake of a shelter for herself, Mr Bradshaw's widowed sister bore his tempers and sneers and unkindness with meek resignation, and managed to endure life under circumstances which would have seemed to a man insupportable.

Her younger and only sister having made up her mind years previously that the workhouse would be preferable to residing with Conroy, had departed from the roof of her wealthy brother, and gone out into the world a governess, to seek from strangers that kindness and sympathy, or at least toleration, which she could not meet with at home; and thus Mr Brad-

shaw lived and reigned, obeyed, but not loved, in the home of his fathers.

And on the morning in question, after having been more than usually sardonic in his manner towards his sister, accusing her of extravagance, of waste, of wanton forgetfulness, of criminal neglect, in short, of everything except downright stealing; after stating that the coffee was cold, and the eggs overdone, and the ham under-boiled; after cursing the baker, and wondering why they could not have their bread made at home, and declaring that 'cream was a thing he was never favoured with a sight of:' after he had, to condense all, vented the indignation which Major Delorme had awakened in his bosom on the unoffending head of his most meek and irreproachable housekeeper, he sat down and penned the following epistle to Major Delorme:—

‘ Moorfield, Friday Morning.

‘ DEAR MAJOR,

‘ I have slept on our quarrel, so have you; if you have cooled on the matter I am ready to let by-gones be by-gones, and forgive and forget what has passed between us. I am not a man to draw back from any proposal I once have made, no matter how badly it may have been received at the time, nor with what ingratitude it may have been treated. If you will *pass your word* to comply with the conditions I named yesterday, why I will go further than I said I would do then, and *give* you the sum you require without further delay. You can consider this offer, and communicate your decision to

‘ Yours truly,

‘ CONROY BRADSHAW.’

‘ He will think twice about *that*,’ remarked the worthy gentleman as he pressed a huge seal upon the wax; ‘ he will think twice about that, if, indeed, he don’t swallow the bait at first sight. It’s a long price to give,’ he added reflectively, ‘ but hang it, a wife is an extravagance one is not guilty of every day; so go it shall,’ and accordingly his servant Thomas was despatched to Major Delorme’s with the letter, having been previously instructed to ‘ give it into that gentleman’s own hands, and to wait for an answer.’

‘There’s a man in the hall wants to speak to you, sir.’

Such were the words that conveyed the knowledge of Thomas’ arrival to Major Delorme, who, being in a particularly cross mood, answered,

‘Let him send in his message—I cannot see him.’

Out again went the servant, but re-appeared only to communicate the intelligence that the man’s message was a letter, which he had orders to deliver to the Major himself and to no other person.

‘Confound him! send the fellow in,’ exclaimed Major Delorme, and forthwith Thomas entered the room, making a humble bow as he did so to the sole occupant of the apartment—the gentleman to whom the epistle he bore was directed.

‘Please, sir,’ he said, ‘I was to give you this and to wait for an answer.’

The Major tore the envelope open, and read its enclosure—a smile of contempt curling his lip the while.

‘You were to wait for an answer, I think you said,’ he remarked to the man.

‘Yes, sir,’ was the reply.

‘Very well, you shall have one,’ said Major Delorme, lighting a taper, and holding Mr Bradshaw’s effusion to the flame till nothing remained of it save a few light ashes. ‘You see what I have done with your master’s letter—tell him that so I will treat any further communication he may have the impertinence to address to me; that is my reply; you can go now and take it to him.’

‘Please, sir,’ hesitated the man, ‘would you write it down. I should be afraid to say it to Mr Bradshaw—it would be as much as my place is worth.’

‘Well, I suppose it is about the value of it,’ responded Major Delorme; ‘but pooh, nonsense, you an Englishman and afraid of nothing or any person; look here, drink my health as you go home and it will give you courage,’ and so saying he flung a crown towards the messenger, who, picking it up with a grin, returned home by stages, and arrived in a state bordering on intoxication, to stammer forth Major Delorme’s answer into the discomfited ears of Mr Bradshaw, who would have sent him about his business at once had he not reflected



just in time that if he did so he should lose his control over the man's tongue, and therefore wisely considered it would be better to retain and hold his mighty offence in terrorem over him, which he did to the effectual silencing of Thomas's gossiping, who never whispered, excepting to two or three especially confidential and peculiarly trustworthy persons, anything about the 'row' between his master and that fine-spirited, free-handed gentleman Major Delorme; and Conroy gnashed his teeth for very rage, and vowed vengeance against Dora and her father, whom he emphatically declared he 'would be even with yet.'

Perhaps in the whole of his experience he had never met with anything which seemed to him more amazing than Major Delorme's refusal to accept *such* a sum, offered as it was upon, to his mind, extremely advantageous terms. He had proposed not merely to give five hundred to the father, but also to take his daughter off his hands, provide her with a most desirable and wealthy husband, and—and in fact do a most generous action, and the return he got for his disinterested liberality and civility was an unmistakeable hint to leave the house and a most insolent message sent through a servant.

No wonder he marvelled at Major Delorme's conduct, and if he had only known the state of desperation to which the officer was reduced, he would have marvelled twenty times more; but as he was not cognizant of the sleepless nights the ruined man had passed, nor of the wretched, agonized thoughts which had kept grim watch beside his pillow and prevented forgetfulness visiting him even for a moment, he came to the conclusion, either that the Major had hit on some other expedient for raising the required amount, or that from some unexpected quarter help had in the interim 'turned up.'

Dora's father knew himself how sick at heart he felt when, meeting Mr Edmund Lesparde in the street, he said to him,

'If you have no better engagement for this evening, will you come and dine with me?'

To which invitation Mr Lesparde replied 'with pleasure;' and having informed him that he should expect to see him at the cottage a little before six, Major Delorme took his leave of the old Colonel's nephew, and sauntering into the office where such things might be procured, purchased a bill-stamp, which he put

in his pocket and took home with him by way of a very faint consolation, and a very forlorn hope.

‘Dora,’ said he to his daughter, ‘Mr Lesparde is coming out here this evening; you remember him, do not you?’

Dora did; she recollected perfectly the months they had passed together at ‘The Oaks,’ ere Mr Edmund went abroad and became — not improved by foreign travel. She had a vivid memory of how gladly she heard he was returning home, and how pleased she felt when the servants said he was in the drawing-room; and there was a still stronger recollection of the bitter disappointment she had experienced when they did meet: she the awkward girl, he the man of the world; when he called her Miss Delorme, and she replied to his remarks in polite sentences and brief monosyllables. Edmund Lesparde he might be still, but not the Edmund Lesparde of the old sunny sorrowful days; time had not improved him, time had changed her; and as since then he and she had never even seen each other, though he and Major Delorme were on terms of the best acquaintanceship, though certainly not of the closest friendship, there was at first no very pleasant vision awakened in Dora’s mind by her father’s announcement.

We none of us much like to encounter those of whom we once thought perhaps too highly, after the world’s breath has passed over and spoiled them; it takes us so long to get accustomed even to the change in the very tone of their voices, to their altered ideas, their different manners, their almost unfamiliar faces, that in most cases it were easier and pleasanter to commence ‘making friends’ with a total stranger than with an old acquaintance, whom, after having longed and waited for years to meet, we find, with a feeling of bitter disappointment, is not the old acquaintance of former times, but a changed being, whom we cannot treat like a stranger, and yet who does not seem precisely a friend.

‘Just the same as ever!’

Of how many that have been companions in youth, and dear memories in later life, can this be said?—of two perhaps in fifty; and when, dear reader, you meet with one, who, after the lapse of time, after foreign travel, after suffering or prosperity, after mixing with many nations, after forming many new ties, and loving many new friends, comes back ‘just the same

as ever'—cherish him as you might some precious gem, valued because of its intrinsic worth, of its exceeding rarity!

For I have seen some scores of partings and greetings of one kind and another; and could count over with the greatest ease, on the fingers of my left hand, the names of those who after the lapse of years have met—not to be disappointed.

But as Miss Dora Delorme had quite recovered from the little vexation of discovering that Mr Edmund Lesparde, of seven-and-twenty, did not in the least degree accord with her memory of the same individual five years previously; and as, moreover, she considered any one must be delightful after Mr Bradshaw, she felt, perhaps, on the whole rather pleased than otherwise at the prospect of seeing him once again; and, probably, she had some faint hopes that, if five years' sojourn on the Continent had spoiled Mr Lesparde, two years' residence in England might have, in at least a measure, restored him to something resembling his former self, in which state of mind six o'clock and the gentleman in question found her.

There was no one thing in the world which Mr Lesparde admired so much as beauty; and, therefore, although his idea of feminine perfection was a vision not precisely resembling Miss Dora Delorme, yet she was possessed of quite sufficient personal attractions to make him arrive at the conclusion, that she really had grown up into a very pretty girl.

And he liked the way in which the flowers were grouped, and the furniture arranged, and the draperies disposed: the taste and elegance of the place pleased him; and when he inquired of Dora, 'If she did not often feel very lonely, and wish to live nearer a town?' her look of unaffected surprise, and the earnest tone in which she answered:—'Oh, no; I would not leave the cottage for the world!' struck him as so much resembling the looks and the tones of the far-back days, when they had known so much about each other, that he felt he quite liked the girl who still was so little changed from what the child had been.

That dinner was by no means a tedious one; Dora mentally contrasted it with the one she had endured on the preceding day; and wondered, as one often does wonder, why there should be such an amazing diversity of character upon the earth—why one individual should make time pass pleasantly, and another

clog its wings with lead—why one person should be so insufferable, whilst another was so agreeable; and, in brief, came to the conclusion, that if Mr Lesparde were not quite so nice as he had been seven or eight years previously, he was certainly a great deal improved since she had seen him some two years before this: having disposed of him in which satisfactory manner, she had just commenced marvelling why her father had asked her, ere she left the dining-room, to bring him an inket, when the door opened and Mr Lesparde and her parent appeared. The former seemed a degree more reserved than he had been an hour before; the latter looked pale, sad, and agitated; and a brief dialogue which had passed between them, after Dora, having laid the writing materials on the table, left the apartment, accounted for the change in both.

‘Mr Lesparde,’ commenced the Major, in a hurried voice, tremulous from emotion, ‘will you do me a great favour?’

‘If in my power,’ returned the other, cautiously, ‘I shall be most happy.’

‘You told me the other day you had really not five hundred pounds which you could conveniently lend me,’ pursued the host.

‘I regretted the fact,’ replied Mr Lesparde, with cold politeness.

‘Well, the truth is, I am desperately in want of that amount; I shall be quite certain to be able to repay it at the end of three months—and—and would you have any objection to lend me your name, for that period?’

‘I do not precisely understand,’ said the visitor, who indeed had no desire to understand.

‘You know, of course, I do not wish you to inconvenience yourself nor anything of that sort, but if you just would put your name on a bill for me, I will undertake to meet it when it becomes due.’

‘I regret, extremely,’ returned Mr Lesparde, decisively, ‘that it is not in my power either to lend you this required amount or to——’

‘But!’ eagerly interrupted the Major, ‘you will be perfectly safe; you will neither lose the money nor the use of it; it is not five hundred pounds I want from you, but merely that you will assist me to get that sum at the Bank; I will give security, if you like, that it shall be paid.’

‘I am very sorry,’ persisted Mr Lesparde, ‘but bills are pieces of paper I have never meddled with, and never will.’

‘You would not incur the least risk in this case,’ implored Major Delorme.

‘It is most painful for me to refuse this apparently slight favour,’ responded the guest; ‘but to condense the matter into a few brief words, if I had five hundred pounds to spare at this moment, I had rather *give* you that amount than commence putting my name on stamped paper, to accommodate even my father were he now alive.’

And this remark, which might indeed very well be considered a ‘settler,’ silencing Major Delorme, he drank a few glasses of wine to drown his care, as if anything can drown anxiety; and when he arose to go with Mr Lesparde into the drawing-room, he felt as those feel who know that the last plank has gone from beneath their feet, that the dark troubled waters of debt, anxiety, and poverty are roaring and boiling around them and must soon engulf their prey. When once a man gets into a position such as that in which Major Delorme managed to place himself, ruin becomes a mere question of time; like death, it is not a possibility but a certainty; let him struggle and fight as he will, let him endeavour to ward off the evil day, it must come at last, and every moment he retains his insecure footing, every new device he thinks of, every new plan he adopts, only makes his crash when it does come the worse: there is nothing in the world so dangerous as that apparently simple but really most utterly futile expedient called ‘staving off.’

And Mr Lesparde felt a something quite approaching to contempt for the man who had invited him to dinner merely to get him to help him out of his difficulties by lending him his signature, and he resolved that although Dora Delorme was pretty, and could sing like an angel, and seemed very amiable, that the cottage should see him no more, that he would maintain a separate way from Major Delorme; that, in one word, he would keep clear of the drowning man lest he should by any means get splashed by the water in which he was fast sinking; whilst Major Delorme felt a wild vehement hatred, a bitter anger rising in his soul against the nephew of his old friend—who would not stretch out even a finger to save him from ruin.



There had never been much love between them: ever since Mr Lesparde returned from foreign travel to take possession of his inheritance, to commence life in England as an idle man of fashion, their friendship had never been more than a polite pretence—for neither liked, neither suited the other.

Both were men of the world—that is, both had lived in the world: the one as the rich spoiled plaything of the world, the other as one who tries, though vainly, to make a plaything of it.

There is a wide difference between the poor and the wealthy man of fashion: the former can scarcely maintain his position, and be still strictly honourable; the latter is rarely if ever the reverse.

The one plumes himself on being able to make successful shifts, by which to ward off the enemy poverty from his door, the other, unless indeed he be sinfully, wilfully extravagant—and of this class I am not at present speaking—has no enemy to dread; has not, in plain words, to get the money before he spends it—some obliging grandfather, aunt, or other relative, having left it for him ready made.

He may not naturally be one bit better-principled than the other; but, happily for himself, he is beyond the reach of the temptations to which his poorer acquaintance is exposed.

Yet there was a wider barrier than that raised by education and circumstances, between Mr Lesparde and Major Delorme; it was the insuperable, insurmountable one created by difference of character. Had the two been thrown penniless on the earth, the latter would not have worked for himself could he possibly have avoided doing so; the former would have been dependent upon no man living: and these characteristics influenced their conduct in the sphere of life in which they chanced to move.

Major Delorme, as has been previously stated, betted on race-horses, lost and won at billiards; if he were unsuccessful, why, he paid readily; and if he gained, he spent the money with reckless prodigality: he was indolent, extravagant, thoughtless; he always expected a fortune to 'turn up' somehow; how, he never very minutely asked himself, but so long as he could keep afloat, he cared not to look at the 'breakers ahead;' hoping still, in spite of hope, that fate would interpose and prevent his being dashed to pieces upon them.



Mr Lesparde was the reverse of all this; cautious and prudent beyond his years, he gambled but little; when he won seeming pleased, when he lost quite the reverse; and although no one could have accused him of absolute parsimony, yet he was of an economical, certainly not of a generous, nature.

He could not understand a man with a fixed income living beyond it, therefore he thought Major Delorme had no right to be in want of five hundred pounds, and refused to lend it him: from that moment a deadly hatred on the one side, and a species of contempt on the other, sprung up between them.

My good sir, if you wish to keep on good terms with your brother, never lend money to, nor borrow money from, him; if you want to be reconciled to your enemy, send him a cheque for a handsome sum. Be assured he will forgive you all past injuries; as for future ones, gratitude being an uncertain and somewhat rare commodity, the less said the better. If you desire to be respected by your friend, never ask him for a sixpence; if you would have him to love you, never remind him of that ten pounds you were so foolish as to lend him when he was 'so sadly pinched,' poor fellow; it is a mean thing, you know, tormenting a person for the recovery of a just debt. So he will think and say, at all events.

The shadow that the gentlemen brought with them from the dining-room fell darkly across the heart of Dora Delorme. Mr Lesparde was not so agreeable as he had been, her father seemed ill and grieved about something.

The pleasant evening she had anticipated turned out a most dreary and gloomy one; the conversation was constrained, the light was clouded in her soul; she had no spirit to sing, her voice sounded powerless and tuneless to her own ear, something was wrong she felt; and altogether it was a relief when, after coffee, the guest departed, and left her and her father alone.

'Are you not well, papa?' she said, as he arose to seek his chamber.

'Quite well, child,' he answered: 'that is—no—I have a head-ache I believe.'

But as he said 'Good-night,' and stooped to kiss her forehead, she further inquired—

‘Has anything happened; has anything unpleasant occurred?’

Major Delorme started as if some sudden pain were caused by her question—

‘No, nothing; nothing of any consequence,’ he returned, after a pause; ‘all will be well in time.’

When the grave closed over him perhaps, but never before.

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## CHAPTER XV.

SUMMER was going; autumn was coming; it was on one of those days which seem to belong exclusively neither to the one season nor the other, that Mr Champion, the deservedly respected manager of the Derbyshire Joint-Stock Banking Company, chanced to overtake Mr Lesparde, as that gentleman was walking down the principal street of Orpen, and by a natural consequence the two proceeded along the pavement together, talking as they went.

Mr Champion was popular with every one; Lord Nayton declared he was about one of the very best-principled men he had ever met with; and John Cole, the abandoned chimney-sweeper, who was considered a sort of pariah in the town, when drunk always affirmed he had become intoxicated in honour of Mr Champion, who was the best gentleman going, and the only honest man (excepting himself) who could be found in Orpen.

If a subscription list were opened it lay at the Bank; if a donation of coals, blankets, or money were to be given to the poor, Mr Champion executed the task to the unbounded satisfaction both of giver and receiver; if a widow were left desolate, somehow he managed to get her supported; if half-a-dozen children were deprived by a sudden accident of their parents, he raised a fund for their maintenance and education: all sects, all classes, all sorts of people liked the banker; if men were unanimous in no other opinion, they all agreed in

considering that Orpen could not get on without Mr Champion.

Such was the individual, who, with the sunbeams falling on his white hair, walked down High Street with Mr Lesparde, for whom he entertained a great esteem and friendship.

‘Do you think Major Delorme will be able to meet the bill?’ he casually inquired.

‘What bill?’ demanded his companion.

‘Why, his bill, or your bill; it only wants a fortnight or so, I think, of being due now. I am greatly afraid, if all I hear be true, that he cannot raise a sixpence: if so it will come very hard on you, for I presume you derived no benefit from the transaction.’

‘I cannot imagine what you are talking about,’ said Mr Lesparde.

‘Why, about the bill you good-naturedly, but I must say very foolishly, put your name on for Delorme,’ returned the banker.

‘I put my name on a bill,’ responded Mr Lesparde; ‘I never did such a thing in my life: what do you mean?’

‘What do you mean, I should rather ask,’ replied Mr Champion; ‘the bill passed through my hands; I saw your name to it; otherwise I should never have thought of letting Major Delorme have the money.’

‘I never signed any paper of the sort,’ said Mr Lesparde.

‘Are you positive? are you serious? are you *quite* certain?’ gasped the banker.

‘Positive, serious, and certain,’ was the response. ‘I was asked by that wretched man first to lend him five hundred pounds, which I declined; subsequently to put my name on paper for him, which also I refused. This occurred about—yes, just about three months since, or rather less; from that time to this I have heard no more of the matter, and concluded he must have got some other friend to help him over his difficulty.’

‘Then he must—he must absolutely have committed—forgery,’ said the banker, dropping the words out slowly and at intervals.

‘It looks uncommonly like it,’ returned Mr Lesparde in an angry, excited tone.

‘My dear sir,’ broke forth Mr Champion, ‘are you sure you have made no mistake? are you quite positive there is no misapprehension about this matter?’

‘There can be none,’ was the reply.

‘Do you think the circumstance might not amidst the press of other matter have escaped your recollection?’

‘I could not have forgotten such an incident without having lost my memory, and I am still in full possession of my faculties,’ Mr Lesparde returned.

‘Did you not affix your name to some paper about the period in question?’ persisted Mr Champion, hoping to elicit something which might exonerate the Major from blame.

‘I never signed anything,’ replied Mr Lesparde angrily; ‘but the shortest and most satisfactory way for us to dispose of the business will be to go to the fountain-head at once, and ask Major Delorme what this means. Nayton,’ he continued, addressing that nobleman, who was just entering the door of the principal hotel in Orpen, leaving his phaeton at the door, ‘if you are going to remain any time will you lend me your carriage for an hour?’

‘With ten hearts, my boy,’ returned the good-natured old lord, and in a few minutes more, almost before he knew where he was or what he was there to do, the banker found himself at the cottage.

‘Major Delorme within?’ demanded Mr Lesparde.

‘Yes, sir;’ and the two gentlemen were ushered into the drawing-room, where the officer was seated alone.

He started on seeing his visitors—they were the bug-bears he had been thinking of, the realities of his bitterest reflection; but with what composure he might, he requested them to be seated, and waited with a sickening heart to learn their business.

Mr Lesparde came to the point at once.

‘We have called to inquire about this bill,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ returned Major Delorme, with a coolness which astonished both gentlemen. ‘Yes, I hope still to be able to meet it.’

‘That is not the question at present,’ pursued Mr Lesparde. ‘My name, it seems, is attached to the paper referred to.’

‘Unquestionably,’ rejoined Major Delorme.

‘Well, you are perfectly aware I never wrote it,’ said Mr Lesparde, waxing very wroth.

‘My dear sir, you are jesting,’ quietly remarked the officer.

‘Jesting! I wish to Heaven I were,’ responded Mr Lesparde. ‘Jesting indeed! do you know, Major Delorme, that this act of yours, which you treat with an assumption of such indifference, is what the law of our land calls forgery.’

‘And do you know, sir, that if you be serious, your words sound wondrously like falsehoods and slanders,’ said Major Delorme, with an expression of anger and astonishment so perfectly natural that it almost deluded the understanding of the worthy banker.

‘Have you the audacity to assert that I ever put my name on a bill for you?’ said Mr Lesparde, with a desperate effort at calmness.

‘I assert that you did, that I felt obliged to you for the accommodation, that I never imagined you would be so base and dishonourable as to deny the transaction,’ was the response.

‘I never thought you were such a scoundrel, Delorme,’ said Mr Lesparde, rising.

‘If I can meet the bill,’ returned the officer, ‘you shall give me satisfaction at ten paces distance; if unhappily I am disappointed about the money, you must prove your assertions before a different tribunal. I do not fear; the innocent never need feel uneasy.’

‘Are you certain,’ interposed the banker, ‘that there is no mistake—no——’

‘How can there possibly be a mistake in such a matter?’ exclaimed Mr Lesparde impatiently. ‘He asserts I signed my name to a paper I never even saw, whilst I am willing and ready to swear I did not.’

‘Well, really, Mr Lesparde, you amaze me,’ returned Major Delorme, to whom long forethought and despair gave a sort of temporary advantage, ‘when you know so well that the signature can be proved.’

‘Proved!—how proved?’ inquired the other.

‘Why, Dora, my daughter, you remember, was in the room when ——’

‘I should like to hear Miss Delorme say so herself,’ interrupted Mr Lesparde.

‘Well, I am sorry that she is not at home, or your desire might be gratified,’ replied Major Delorme, so quietly that Mr Champion was quite confounded; ‘but perhaps you would do me the favour of calling any time to-morrow, and Mr Champion can judge between us for himself.’

‘You are a most accomplished liar, Delorme,’ burst forth Mr Lesparde.

The Major’s face flushed, but he made a violent effort to subdue his emotion, and answered—

‘You do well to come and insult me because you think I am poor, and that I shall not be able to meet this bill, by which you fear you will be a loser. I cannot forget what is due to myself and my guests so far as to fling back the epithet you have thought fit to apply to me, though my word might contain more truth than yours ever did, but enough of this. Mr Champion, I am grieved you should have been the witness of such a scene.’

‘And so am I—truly sorry,’ broke in the banker, who began to believe it was going to be a very bad and intricate business.

‘But,’ resumed Major Delorme, ‘if you desire full satisfaction on the subject, please return to-morrow, my daughter will then be here to answer any inquiries you may wish to make. May I expect you?’

‘You certainly may,’ returned Mr Lesparde in a tone of withering contempt; and the banker, after adding—

‘Why, yes; it would be satisfaction to all parties to see Miss Delorme,’ took leave of the officer, and accompanied by Mr Lesparde, who was in a state of fury almost approaching frenzy, drove back to Orpen.

‘Do you think the young lady will be forth-coming?’ demanded Mr Champion, cautiously and narrowly scrutinizing his companion’s face as he asked the question.

‘She—no!’ returned Mr Lesparde.

‘Then she did not—’ commenced the banker.

‘Witness what never happened?’ replied the other. ‘How *could* the girl see me sign what I never signed!’ and Mr Champion, feeling himself unable to answer that query, went home in a very perplexed state of mind, to see what the morrow might bring forth.



If there be, as undoubtedly there is, a horror in dreams beyond anything we ever experienced in our waking moments, so also there is an intense racking agony, which seems almost unreal in its misery, and half deludes the sufferer into the belief that he must waken from it and find it after all only a vision.

And there is a stage of guilt, when the heart has ceased to be comparatively innocent, and yet ere it has become wholly depraved, when conscience sways one way, and circumstances or fancied necessity another, return seeming impossible, and to go on the only dreadful alternative remaining, which, in its wild despair and unutterable agony, gives the helpless wretch who has reached it an idea of a future state of punishment, that has power to appal, though, alas! not to make him repent. Some are guilty because they are weak; others, because they are bad; Major Delorme belonged to the former class; he had gone on by slow degrees from bad to worse; he had not taken the first step nor the final plunge with his eyes fully open: men, to have heard his story, would have thought him a finished villain; God, who knew his heart, saw he was a wayward suffering sinner, who, dimly conscious of the wrong, thought to repair it by still greater wrong; who would not see the right, who determinedly closing his heart, and turning his head aside, half wilfully, half reluctantly, pursued the crooked path, and called his foolishness—wisdom.

He had acted rashly—wickedly, in order to stave off ruin from his door. He had hoped to be able to retire the bill when it became due; he had not intended to harm Mr Lesparde; he had meant he should know nothing of the matter. We have all heard of the place which is paved with ‘good intentions;’ the Major had intended not evil, but evil came of it—as it always will do of everything which is undertaken upon the principle, that ‘the end justifies the means’—that the holiest object can sanctify the lightest thought of sin.

He had meant, but was unable to perform. Instead of fortune smiling upon the man who threw his future into her hands, she frowned and refused to second any one of his endeavours; ruin came down upon him; misfortunes, like vultures, always darken the horizon when a new victim is struck to the earth; his health gave way, his hand grew un-

steady, and his eye incorrect at billiards; when he touched the dice-box, a curse seemed to lie in it for him; if he ventured a few bets, his favourite came in second: people saw he was on the broad high-road, which unhappily is taxed to no one, which is bordered with cares, strewed with blighted hopes, thorny with agonizing thoughts: stinging brambles, in the shape of wearing anxieties and apprehensions, spring up in every step; yet all are free to travel the highway which is trod by thousands; whereon is no turnpike—which is broad and straight, and leads surely to an end—which end is—ruin!

So, there was not a creditor to whom he owed a shilling, that did not press him for payment of his little account. There was not a friend he had who would lend him a five-pound note; every one began to look coldly upon him—the religious because he was not a moral man, but one who did not attend church very regularly, who betted at races, and gambled, and ran into debt; the worldly shunned him because he was almost at ‘his last gasp,’ and could never be of further use to any one, and was only a bore, and who had besides ‘poverty’ written on him as legibly as if the word had been branded on his forehead, by the ruthless hand of adversity.

Only one in the world loved and respected him. Only one did not turn coldly from him. Only one watched his face, and as she saw it grow pale and careworn, redoubled in her attentions towards him. Only one was ignorant that ruin was the goal to which he was journeying. Only one had no idea that thither she was travelling with him—his child—Dora Delorme! whose name he had introduced into a falsehood; whose heart he meant to cloud with sorrow; to whom he proposed teaching the knowledge of sin, and give it actual experience of its bitterness. All his previous steps had been taken hastily; all his previous faults had been transgressions more in the result than in the original intention; but, although he had, resting on a mere bravado, held out his daughter’s name to frighten Mr Lesparde, to delude the banker, he persisted in his frantic falsehood, and determined to make her tell an untruth, that he, so the wretched man believed, might be saved.

Once again, then, he wilfully deceived himself as to the result; but this time there could be no delusion concerning the wickedness of the means. On previous occasions he had thought,

‘this can do no harm to any one, while it will do me great good;’ but though now he tried to whisper conscience to sleep about his daughter, and said ‘what is an untruth? it is nothing; it will give me time to recover; it will save me from a felon’s fate; it will enable me to pay all I owe,’ conscience would not be quieted, but kept knelling in his ear, ‘it is wrong—it is wrong—nothing but evil—evil, and disappointment, and sorrow—can come of it: sacrifice, humble, destroy yourself; but have mercy, have pity on her!’

When, however, had a man who saw transportation staring him in the face, mercy on anything save himself? He had refused Mr Bradshaw’s offer for her sake, surely she might stretch a point for his.

He loved his daughter, perhaps, as unselfishly as it was in his nature to love anything; yet still he determined to cast a blight over her whole life that his honour might perhaps be preserved untainted in the eyes of the world.

Oh! how much more some think of standing well in the opinion of their fellows than of being known by the Almighty to have resisted temptation, and patiently borne contumely and calumny, because conscience said in its deep earnest voice, ‘it is right to do so.’

How much more men think of their temporal welfare than of their future happiness; how ceaselessly they cast anxious glances at time; how seldom they bestow a hurried look on eternity.

Ere evening came, Major Delorme had wildly calculated and sinfully resolved; the time of agonized struggle was past; the period for guilty action had arrived; he might have rushed into evil without consideration, but he resolved to persevere in sin with a full knowledge of the fact.

And how the sense of wrong, of falsehood, of deceit dawned on the soul of Dora Delorme may best be explained in a new chapter.

## CHAPTER XVI.

‘DORA,’ said Major Delorme to his daughter, as they sat together on a bench in the garden in the soft light of that August evening; ‘Dora, do you remember the day Mr Lesparde dined here?’

‘Yes, papa,’ she returned.

‘Do not you recollect, almost immediately after dinner, his affixing his signature to a paper? it was a bill for five hundred pounds.’

‘No,’ said Dora, after a moment’s hesitation; ‘no, I was not in the room at the time; I recollect leaving the inket on the table by your desire, but saw nothing further.’

‘Are you certain you were not there when he wrote his name?’ demanded Major Delorme; ‘I am almost positive you were.’

‘No; indeed I was not,’ she persisted.

Major Delorme mused for a moment, then looking up, resumed, speaking rapidly,

‘Dora, I am a ruined, a dishonoured man unless you will save me.’

His daughter’s eyes opened, and her cheeks turned very pale, whilst with a hurried utterance he proceeded:

‘I was greatly pushed for money at the time; and Mr Lesparde, being unable conveniently to lend me such a sum just then, put his name on a bill for me, as the transaction is called, which enabled me to procure the required amount at the Bank. He did this under the impression that when it came due at the end of three months’ time I should be able to meet, or in other words pay it; and at the period I asked him to accommodate me, I fully expected to be relieved from all embarrassment ere now, but various circumstances have conspired to plunge me into still greater difficulties; he fears he shall be a loser by me, and consequently this very afternoon, in the presence of Mr Champion, the banker, he affirmed he never signed the paper, or, in plainer language, accused me of—forgery!’

‘You, papa!’ gasped Dora, the last word of the sentence making the foregoing portion perfectly plain to her understanding, ‘you, papa!’

‘Yes, me! on whose honour malice itself never before dared to cast a slur, and you, my dear, dear child, alone can save me from a horrible fate.’

‘Can I save you?’ she eagerly demanded, ‘only say how, and——’

‘Yes, yes, I know you will do what I require of you. When Mr Lesparde asserted so positively to-day that he never signed the paper, I declared I could prove the matter, for that you had been in the room at the time.’

‘Oh! dear papa,’ she interposed, ‘what a pity you made the mistake, what a dreadful thing you did not remember——’

‘Well, well, that cannot be helped now,’ he in his turn interrupted, ‘let me proceed. I said you were a witness to the transaction; that it was worse than folly for him to deny it, as I could prove the whole affair, whereupon, I suppose with a more distinct recollection of the facts than had remained on my memory, he answered very triumphantly, “I should like to hear Miss Delorme say she saw me sign my name to any paper.” If you will return to-morrow, said I, she will be at home; and you can see and hear her speak for herself, which he replied he certainly should do, and so, Dora, he and Mr Champion will be here in the morning.’

‘To see me!’ exclaimed Dora, ‘and what can I say? what can I do?’

‘You must,’ responded her father, seeing that hints were thrown away upon her, and moreover losing patience, ‘you must just stretch your memory a little, and say you recollect seeing Mr Lesparde attach his name to a paper.’

‘But, papa, I did not; it would not be true,’ she anxiously returned, trembling violently.

‘Hang the truth!’ he hastily and angrily replied; but then observing the apprehensive look which darkened his daughter’s eyes, he continued, ‘Dora, in this world we tell and act fibs every day—we say we are glad to see a person for whom we do not care a straw, and smile and grasp his hand as though he were our dearest friend; we pronounce things to be pretty which are most probably frightful; we tell our servants to say we are “not at home” when we are sitting snugly in our drawing-rooms; we exclaim, “my dear madam, what sweet children you are blest with,” whilst we are wishing the

noisy ugly imps at the bottom of the sea or perhaps still further ; and yet the most Christian and righteous people are not shocked by these falsehoods—"They are necessary to the courtesies of life and the well-being of society," we all cry in chorus, and so fib on to the end of our days. Now I do not want you to affirm what is absolutely an untruth, for Mr Lesparde did sign the paper—all I ask of you, all I require is that you will stretch the point a little and say you saw him do it.'

The Major had made a mistake—he was a man who could lie fast enough when urged by desperation, but he could never confess to an untruth with a grace, nor throw a veil, no matter how flimsy, over a falsehood—he either must stick to it boldly or confess to the deception—either deck it out in the fair colours of truth or permit it to appear in its full deformity. A very bold villain he might seem and ultimately become ; a very obstinate, weak, unprincipled man he assuredly was ; but a finished, polished deceiver he never could be, and consequently in his attempt to delude his daughter's understanding by an absurd sophism, by the mere act of stating wrong to be right, he signally failed.

She did not at first, it is true, fully comprehend the drift of her father's speech, but as by degrees its meaning became developed, the sickening horror which crept over her soul is not to be described.

'Dora,' said her father, after a dreary pause, during which he waited in vain for an answer ; 'Dora, why do you not speak ?'

Still there came no reply ; her head was turned away from him ; but gently placing his hand upon it, he stooped down and looked into her face : tears were streaming from the beautiful eyes ; he drew her closer towards him : when, suddenly inspired by a hope, that perhaps she might have been mistaken, she laid her head confidently on his shoulder, and sobbed like a child.

At the instant he would have given anything to recall the last six months of his life ; he had never until then properly estimated the strength and purity of his daughter's character ; indeed, he had scarcely thought about it at all, but carelessly and rapidly had come to the conclusion that her disposition resembled her mother's at a similar age.

He had not noticed or understood the religious and moral



principles which time and adversity developed in his wife; nor had he ever studied Dora's nature sufficiently to comprehend, that in many most important respects, she was widely dissimilar from her mother.

He knew well enough he could have persuaded Mrs Delorme to do anything; nay more—possibly in spite of the fine theoretical sense of duty she possessed, which was capable of effectually guarding her from ever voluntarily committing a mean or dishonourable action, he might, by dint of much entreaty, or the aid of specious argument, have almost induced her for the time being to believe wrong was right; but now it dawned upon his comprehension, that if his daughter were induced to swerve from the path which has no turn or crooked bend, no tortuous winding, it would be by the instrumentality of no palpable, or even ingenious, sophistry.

Major Delorme, unhappily, never considered an equivocation in the light of a falsehood; but he now saw Dora deemed it a mean subterfuge, which was more contemptible even than a deliberate, straightforward untruth; in effect it seemed to her a kind of quibbling with the justice of the Almighty—which rendered it even more blameable and more despicable than a direct falsehood.

The instant this conviction flashed through his mind, Major Delorme resolved to speak boldly and plainly, to influence his child to do wrong for the sake of the great love she bore him; for he perceived it was worse than useless to endeavour to make evil appear good in the eyes of one who saw far too clearly for her own peace of mind.

Back he could not bring himself to go; therefore, forward to destruction he must proceed, and Dora, being his daughter, must travel along the road with him—the road leading to what an end! A sort of fiend seemed to be dwelling within the bosom of the wretched man: the more desperate his position became, the more resolved he grew to face and fight the matter out; to sin still further himself, to cloud her life for ever, sooner than yield, than confess. Confess! he would have died sooner.

'Dora,' he said at length, 'there is no use in mincing the matter; if you will not consent to this slight deviation from truth, I shall certainly be transported.'

‘Dear papa!’ she remonstrated, clasping her hands together, and looking entreatingly in his face; ‘dear papa, do not say so; your cause being just, surely you have a better chance than Mr Lesparde, for, though you have no witnesses to prove that he wrote his name, neither has he to prove that he did not. Surely your word is as good as his,’ but as the full meaning of these last words struck back upon her ear, her soul misgave her; doubt of him had entered even her heart; even Dora Delorme had lost implicit faith in the truthfulness of her father.

‘No,’ said the latter, in answer to her hurried interrogatory; ‘no; it would not stand so well in a court of law: the mere fact of my having asserted that you saw Mr Lesparde sign the paper, and not being able to prove it, would tell dreadfully against me; then Mr Lesparde is wonderfully popular in Orpen; he is considered a pattern of honour, honesty, and principle; he is idolized by all ranks, and the jury who would have to try the case, would almost return a verdict in his favour, despite of evidence; how much more so when there is absolutely none, at least, in my favour. I am poor and he is rich; I am known to have lost heavily lately on races, to have been a gambler to a considerable extent since—since I came from India; in fact,’ he added, by way of a general summing-up, ‘to have lived on my capital and my wits, and to have been frequently in terrible want of money; in short, Dora, the jury would say the temptation had been too great for me to withstand, and so return a verdict in favour of the guilty party!’

Silently and sorrowfully she digested this reply before she inquired, ‘Surely you do not mean that you would have me to go into a court of justice and——’

‘No, no,’ he hastily interrupted, ‘all I want you to do is to *say* to-morrow, when Mr Lesparde and Mr Champion call, that you saw the former sign a paper which I have since informed you was a bill for five hundred pounds; of course the answer quashes the proceedings at once, he can never think of denying his signature after that.

‘But suppose he should?’ demanded Dora.

‘Why suppose an impossibility?’ asked Major Delorme.

‘Because I do not consider it to be one,’ replied she.

‘Pooh! child; you are talking about what you do not

understand,' he angrily retorted. 'Do this for me, it is all I require, it is all I shall ever ask. I feel it hard,' he added reproachfully, 'to have so earnestly to crave a boon from you, Dora. I thought you loved me, but——'

'Father!' she vehemently exclaimed, 'be not unjust to me, your poor Dora. Love you! oh! that in some other way I could show how I love you, and I would gladly lay down my life to do it; but if you love me, as I know you do, do not ask me to do this thing—let them try, let them transport you, or, better still, let us leave this place at once—fly from sin and danger. I will beg, work, starve, die for you, but tell this untruth I cannot.'

'Then you do not care for my being dishonoured and deemed a liar and a forger by my acquaintances. Dora, I like a love which is active, which says I will do what you ask, and does not always exclaim, "Anything but this I can attempt." You do not care for me, your affection cannot stand the slightest sacrifice, you——'

'Oh!' she interrupted, 'do not say that—it is not for love of myself, not from any selfish feeling, I hesitate to obey you; but, dear, dear father, there is One who must be considered before men, and in His blessed book, which comforted my angel mother, it is written——'

'None of your preaching, Dora,' he vehemently interposed, 'no sermonizing to me, if you please. I hate and detest cant beyond anything on earth—before you are forty you will have told many untruths on your own account, though you now make such a fuss about a trifling falsehood which would save your father from ruin. It is the way with all great saints and extra pious people, who pretend to be better than their neighbours—your mother was as holy as you, to say the least of it, and she would never have hesitated to do what I desired her. There, let me go,' he continued, pushing the weeping girl violently from him, 'you do not care for me; let me remind you of a commandment, which says, "Thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother," which you seem to have forgotten—some never recollect more of the Scriptures than exactly suits their own purpose. I trust what you call religion may console you when I am suffering because of your overstrained, absurd, sinful scruples,' and he crossed the grass plot and re-

entered the house, leaving Dora alone with her own bitter reflections.

The dew fell thickly on the grass, and lay heavily in the bosoms of the sleeping flowers, but she did not heed it; she sank from the bench to the ground and lay there deluging the earth with tears, whilst the damp dew silently descending soaked her hair and dress.

There is an hour of bitter trial which comes sooner or later to every one; it had arrived now to Dora, and the sky of the summer night darkened and darkened, and the eye could discern no object in the little garden, but still the girl lay there on the ground, her face resting amidst the cool grass, clouds of sorrow gathering around her soul, and the night closed over her; and to God alone were the thoughts which rent her heart and nearly maddened her ever fully known.

When its day's course is done the sun sinks to rest behind the western hills; when the earth is sufficiently saturated with moisture, the rain ceases to descend; when we have fulfilled our destined time here below we die; and so in like manner when tears have somewhat relieved the bursting heart, the fountain refuses longer to flow, lest excessive weeping should prove more injurious than not weeping at all: and thus at length Dora's sobs became less convulsive, and after a few moments more of silent, bitter agony, she arose and crossed once again the threshold of that home which could never more be a happy home unto her.

As she passed the door of her father's chamber, she heard him pacing to and fro; but she hurried on to her own apartment, dreading another interview ere her mind was more composed.

The world sees human beings happy, gay, and apparently free from care; but the four walls of their quiet rooms could, if endowed with speech, tell of struggles, tears, regrets, passions, repentances carefully concealed from stranger eyes.

A few hours previously, Dora Delorme had gone out from her chamber a light-hearted girl; she now returned to it a pale, broken creature, a completely wretched, altered being.

When I see such a change I wonder whether it were better to have had from infancy practical knowledge of the cares and sorrows of existence, or to learn them suddenly when the judg-

ment is matured and the heart somewhat aged; whether the sudden shock, or the dropping experience of every-day trial from childhood, be the most difficult to bear. The shock, the dreadful crush, may produce a more injurious effect for a period, and appear at first sight the most unendurable; but surely it is good to have some period of life to look back upon—no matter how dark the present may be—when earth appeared bright as heaven, when all human beings were deemed kind and good, when the days seemed longer, warmer, more joyful than they ever do in after-times; when the skies looked more blue, the grass more green, the streams more bright; when we dreamed of no change; when the joy of the fresh young heart flung a rosy tint over every landscape.

Was it not Sir Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras, who wrote: 'I don't know how it is, but when I look back to early years *I always associate sunshine with them*; when I think of Northwood Side, I always think of a fine day, with the sunbeams streaming down upon Kelvin and its woody banks.'

Happy the man who, after an absence of thirty years spent under the scorching suns of India, amid all the tumult and din of war, could at the expiration of that period recall to memory the scenes of his early days with such unalloyed pleasure!

Had those early years been associated in his mind with the thought of storms and sorrows, there could not have been that broad sunshiny landscape to look back upon, which still seemed bright though the blood and clouds of more than a quarter of a century intervened.

To Dora Delorme the joy of life was to her thenceforth as a memory of the past, whilst the knowledge of sorrow had become a reality of the present. It was probably the first night of her existence in which the girl's head never pressed a pillow: she sat herself down and passed some weary hours, first in thought, then in silent prayer—not to be shown the right path, for she knew it, but earnestly and tearfully she implored strength from on high to keep it.

She asked God to turn her father's heart, to save him and herself from sin, to preserve both from the consequences of his guilt.

Guilt! then was what he had told her not true? Oh! the



thought was barely whispered in her petition, but there was a horror, an agony in her heart which trebled in intensity as time wore on—she could not speak the words plainly even to herself, but she felt that she did not believe his story.

Had she been convinced he was innocent, her way would have been comparatively easy; for innocence is always brave if not always victorious, and never seeks to prove its purity or maintain its cause by falsehood; and the more the poor girl reflected the more strongly the conviction forced itself upon her that the temptation *had* been too much for her father to withstand, that his integrity had yielded to the overwhelming pressure of circumstances.

He had rashly, thoughtlessly, confessed to having lost many sums at play, to having striven to gain money by any means, and these confessions sunk down into the soul of his child. There are moments in life when words, which the speaker imagines will leave behind them no more impression than the passing wind, become stamped so indelibly on the mind as to resist through life the effacing action of the waves of time: yet those lightly-uttered sentences may turn the world into a desert, or form an oasis in the midst of the cares and troubles of earth for memory to turn back and rest upon.

Had Major Delorme considered but [for one moment, he never would have permitted his daughter to learn the mode in which his life was spent—would still have permitted her to remain in happy ignorance, believing him a model of all rare virtues; but the words which opened Dora's eyes had been spoken without reflection, were scarcely remembered by him afterwards, and yet it was that single sentence which sounded in her ears, and brought with it the dread and self-reproach so natural to a young and sensitive mind. He had acted wrongly, sinfully, it is true, but might she not also have been to blame?

For she had gratified every wish, whether of luxury or benevolence; whenever she wanted money she had unhesitatingly asked for it, never dreaming, poor child, that her father could be really poor. 'Was not this thoughtlessness criminal?' she now mentally questioned herself. 'If she had been more economical, if she had considered that her father's actual income did not warrant her lavish expenditure, if she had restrained



his prodigal liberality, might not this great trial have been averted?' and thus to all other griefs was added that which after all is the most difficult to bear—the gnawing pang of self-reproach.

And he being, as she more than feared, guilty, and she the last prop which stood betwixt him and punishment, disgrace, pain: could she still refuse to save him? Which would be the most wrong—to let him perish, or to rescue him? Which?

She leant her head on her hands as the thought swept through her mind; affection pleaded in favour of the last, conscience whispered for the former. But had not her mother said with her dying breath, 'Obey your father in all things, Dora,' and if a few words—*only* a falsehood could save him.

'Oh, God!' she cried in agony, as the love of her heart grew strong, and the purpose of her soul weak, 'have mercy on my erring heart, and keep both of us from sin; Thou who art all-powerful, rescue him and me, for though I see the right, without Thy help I shall never be able to hold fast by it;' and once again the pale face dropped on her hands, and tears rained through the slender fingers. Oh! how fearfully strong affection proves in all such cases; how woefully weak conscience becomes after the first moment of firmness, in which all the powers of the mind are called into play, and endow the tongue and the heart alike with the ability to refuse.

The candle had burnt low, it was flickering faintly in its socket—faintly and tremulously like the good thoughts and righteous resolves of the unhappy girl—when a sudden noise, as if caused by the fall of some heavy body in the next apartment, made her start suddenly and hurry into her father's chamber.

The light was still burning on the table, but Major Delorme was stretched senseless on the floor, struck down by sudden paralysis.

'Father! dear father! won't you speak to me—to me, your own poor Dora,' she cried, but no answer came, and flinging herself beside him, she uttered a shriek so loud, so piercing, that it rang through the house and brought assistance to her. The servants found her sitting on the floor, supporting her father's head on her breast, kissing his forehead in a sort

of despair, and weeping and lamenting over him she supposed dead.

They placed him in bed; sent for medical assistance, which was speedily procured; all the usual restoratives were applied with, perhaps, more than the usual success, and ere morning fully broke, the doctor pronounced there was no immediate danger to be apprehended; but said, he deemed it possible, the power of one side was lost for ever.

‘You must not allow your father to be excited in any way,’ said the man of medicine; ‘it may prove fatal; perfect quiet, perfect repose, perfect ease of mind are absolutely indispensable. With these I do not fear for the result, but otherwise—’ The blank was quite as expressive to Dora as any words could have been.

‘Are you aware,’ demanded the doctor, after a pause, ‘of any violent agitation which can have shaken his nerves?’

‘I believe,’ replied Dora tremulously, ‘he has been rather anxious for some time past.’

‘Ah, so I thought—so I thought,’ he responded; ‘take good care of him, keep him quiet—perfectly quiet; take care of yourself too, Miss Dora, do not remain too much in the sick-room. I will be back again in the course of an hour or two,’ and so saying he hurriedly departed to attend another patient.

Dora crept back to her father’s side. ‘Dear, dear papa,’ she said, ‘only recover, only live for me, for my sake; do not distress yourself about anything; *I—I will do all you wish.*’

The words, though uttered in a choking voice, were spoken with wonderful calmness, the deceitful calmness of desperation and despair. Major Delorme pressed her hand in answer.

Once more his child’s lips touched his forehead, and love had triumphed—as it has often done before, and since, and will again—over duty.

## CHAPTER XVII.

NOON came: what a weary troubled morning it had been to Dora Delorme; true the birds sang gaily as ever, the sun shone brightly as it had been wont to do, the flowers were beautiful and fresh, but the gladness of heart which had formerly given her the power to enjoy nature's loveliness was gone.

All without appeared joyous as summer, and a blue heaven above, and a green earth beneath could make it; but all within was dark and gloomy as a December's night.

Wearily and anxiously the hours dragged on, and yet, full of wretchedness as they were, Dora thought they sped too rapidly; if she could have made each moment a year how thankfully she would have done so, in order to delay even for a brief space the arrival of those who she knew were only coming to complete her misery.

Almost since day broke she had listened with feverish agony for any sound which might announce their approach; hours of dread and watching and waiting passed drearily away, then noon came—past: it was almost one o'clock before Mr Champion and Mr Lesparde arrived.

For the latter, although he had been all the morning impatiently desiring an interview, would not proceed to the cottage unaccompanied by the banker, and Mr Champion was unable conveniently to leave Orpen until after the great hands of the parish clock pointed to twelve.

'We wish to see Major Delorme,' said Mr Lesparde to the servant, who somehow, he thought, did not appear much inclined to admit him.

'Major Delorme has had a paralytic stroke, and is very ill, sir,' was the response.

'Humph!' returned Mr Lesparde; then added in a lower tone to his companion, whilst a contemptuous smile curled his lip, 'I expected some excuse of this kind.'

'If Miss Delorme be disengaged,' interposed Mr Champion, 'will you ask her to favour me with a few minutes' conversation?' and he handed his card to the servant, who forthwith

ushered them into the drawing-room, and went to inform the young lady of their arrival. But Dora needed no announcement of the fact; she had heard them come, she knew they were waiting for her, and with a hurried step, and as if she feared a moment's delay might cause her to waver in her purpose, she descended the stairs, opened the drawing-room door, and stood before them.

White as death was her face, cold as ice was the hand Edmund Lesparde took in his; there was a strong sort of determination in her face, a look of desperate heart-broken resolution: the banker looked silently at the girl, and felt he did not like the business at all.

'I am sorry that my father——' she began.

'It is of no consequence,' said Mr Lesparde, 'seeing you will do quite as well, if not better.'

For the first time in his life Mr Champion thought his companion rude, and, therefore, before proceeding further, he inquired kindly—

'Is Major Delorme very ill?'

'Very!' responded Dora; then noticing the incredulous expression of Mr Lesparde's countenance, she continued, 'The doctor, who has just gone, however, says he believes there is now no absolute danger.'

'When we were here yesterday he looked very well,' remarked Mr Lesparde.

'He has not been well for some months,' said Dora, earnestly, and she turned an appealing glance towards Mr Lesparde; but she might as well have fixed it on a rock.

'We should not have thought of intruding upon you under the present distressing circumstances,' commenced Mr Champion, noticing his companion's ill-concealed impatience, 'but your father appointed this day for an interview with you, to the end that we might obtain a satisfactory answer to a simple question.' The banker paused for a moment, he saw Dora's countenance become, as he spoke, first crimson, then the blood retreating to her heart, left it colourless as ever; and once again a rich tell-tale carnation mantled her cheek, when he demanded—

'We merely wished to know if you recollect ever seeing Mr Lesparde sign any paper in this house?'

‘I do,’ she returned, but the words were spoken so faintly that the banker, leaning forward, said,

‘I beg your pardon, I did not quite catch your reply.’

‘Yes!’ The untruth almost choked her, but by some means she managed to pronounce the solitary monosyllable.

‘Upon what occasion?’ he pursued.

‘When Mr Lesparde last dined here.’

‘Oh! indeed; how long is that since?’

‘Very nearly three months; not quite, however.’

‘Miss Delorme,’ broke in Mr Lesparde, ‘I am perfectly well aware you must have been tutored to say this; but, good Heavens, are you conscious of the full meaning of the answers you have just returned to Mr Champion.’

‘I am!’ She was calm again, and the reply, though spoken in a low tone, was unhesitating.

‘Are you aware this matter will be made the subject of a trial?’ he continued.

‘Yes!’

‘In which case you will have to prove on oath that which you have this moment asserted.’

‘I know it.’

‘And *can* you do *so*?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you mean to say you will declare before God and man that you ever saw me, not my deceased uncle, nor any other person bearing the same name, but me, Edmund Lesparde, affix my signature, in this house, to any paper whatever?’

‘I do.’

‘Let us go—let us go,’ said her questioner, rising, ‘this is too much for me to bear; so young and still so perfectly hardened; and yet,’ he added, turning to Dora, ‘you are the same, who, when a child, was trained by a religious mother; oh! Miss Delorme, think of her; think of those days of innocence, and then confess that what you have just now spoken is false; it is not yet too late; only speak.’

‘It is true.’ The words came trembling over Dora’s lips which were perfectly colourless. Mr Lesparde had paused for her reply, and now he heard it.

‘I could not have believed it possible,’ he ejaculated; ‘let us go, Mr Champion; it is not for the value of the money this

business grieves me ; no ! but there is no use in speaking of that now, we have heard far more than we wished to hear--Miss Delorme, good morning.'

The banker would fain have paused for a moment, but his companion pulled him away.

'Mr Lesparde !' Dora faintly exclaimed, but the appeal never reached his ear ; they were gone—and with hands clasped she remained alone ; but alone she found it utterly impossible to continue ; anything, any one, any place had now become preferable to solitude ; so she stole back to the side of the man who had caused her all this bitter misery ; she resumed her watch beside the couch of him, at whose suggestion she had uttered the first falsehood which ever passed her lips ; for whose sake she saw it would be necessary for her to sacrifice her soul's peace for ever.

Meanwhile the two gentlemen pursued their way back to Orpen. For a considerable period not a word was spoken by either, but at length, just as they entered the town, Mr Champion said :

'In the ordinary course of business, I should have known nothing of this matter until the bill became due ; suppose we forget all about it till that period arrive.'

'What do you mean ?' demanded Mr Lesparde.

'Why, if Major Delorme had been able to retire it, and that I had not unhappily chanced to mention the affair to you, there would have been an end of the affair.'

'Yes, but you have mentioned it to me ; and we both know it is a forgery.'

'Hush, hush ! my dear fellow—I want to forget that.'

'But—' commenced Mr Lesparde.

'I do not profess to be a stoic,' responded Mr Champion. 'I know very well the law of the land, and the rules of bankers, and the meaning of justice ; but, still, if any arrangement can be made—if anything can be done—if this wretched man can raise the required amount, you would not have me step out of my path to crush him, and blast the entire future of that young girl.'

'And you would have me to take the matter quietly, and let a fellow like that accuse me of—'

'My dear Lesparde, be reasonable ; no one but you and me



knows a syllable about it, excepting indeed Major Delorme and his daughter—*they* will be quiet, you may be sure, and I mean to forget the circumstance, and—'

'There is such a thing as right, Mr Champion,' interposed Mr Lesparde.

'And as anger—and as revenge—and as mercy—and as pity,' continued the banker. 'Let us now separate, and pursue our different paths. I don't want to hear another syllable about it till the three months have expired, and not then, if I can help it. Now, pray, do not expostulate,' he added, seeing Mr Lesparde about to speak, 'for I know what is right and what is wrong, perfectly well—if the amount be paid, why, I shall ask no further questions; and there's an end of a matter of which I wish, from the bottom of my heart, I had never heard a word; and in which I wish still more I had never meddled.'

'Pay!—the man has not a shilling in the world,' said Mr Lesparde, in answer to a former portion of the banker's speech.

'Well, well, perhaps he has not, or perhaps he has; at all events, I want to hear no more of the affair at present—there, go home, like a good fellow, and think about what I have said,' and he shook hands with his companion, who felt much too angry to be satisfied with Mr Champion's way of treating the matter.

'That is always the mode in which such things are thought of,' he mentally exclaimed: 'if a man want to be pitied, he has only to commit a great crime, and then everybody's sympathy goes with him; whilst the injured party is thought cruel and vindictive, if he seek to clear himself from some slanderous imputation, or punish a person who has wronged him. I always considered Champion a man of honourable principle and sterling integrity until to-day, but, pity, and youth, and a pretty face, work wonders. He cannot possibly think I am deceiving him in the matter; oh, no! that cannot be; he has known me for years—it must be pity; well, I wish, myself, that girl had not been mixed up in the business; but I never imagined she could speak such falsehoods—how deceptive a thing is loveliness! I thought if there were truth in a woman's face, it shone out from hers—until to-day.' And in a very excited frame of mind, Mr Lesparde eagerly agreed to take a long ride with Captain Ermington, and afterwards to dine with him,

and then to attend a grand ball, to which, of course, he had been invited, which was to be held in the county town of Orpen, and graced, moreover, with all the rank and beauty which could be found within a radius of twenty miles; and so the day passed and the night too, and when the morning appeared, Mr Lesparde found himself once again at his lodgings, for he had let 'The Oaks' for a term of years, and merely lived in apartments at Orpen; which he found much more desirable and agreeable in every respect than dwelling alone in a huge, rambling country house, with no society more enlivening than the rector's, readily procurable, within several miles.

There was a note lying on the table for him, it was directed in a lady's hand, and tearing the envelope he found it was from Dora Delorme. It had been written the preceding evening, and had arrived, his servant stated, just after his master left for the ball. Mr Lesparde angrily crushed it up, for its contents were to request that he would spare her a few minutes' conversation. Cold as the north pole was the answer he forthwith penned, stating his 'regret', that it was impossible for him to comply with her wishes. He did this before, wearied and annoyed, he endeavoured to get a few hours' sleep—when once again he entered his sitting-room another note from Dora was awaiting him.

'If,' she said, 'in consideration of former times, you would grant me this great favour, I should feel more grateful than words can express. At any hour which might best suit your convenience I could arrange to be disengaged.'

Mr Lesparde ate his breakfast savagely, glancing at the note.

'No!' he exclaimed, 'it is some new device of her father's: to that house I will not go: they are both alike; she may be but an instrument in his hands, but she is a very efficient one. No; they have given me sufficient annoyance as it is;' and accordingly, in the course of the afternoon, he despatched a second brief, barely polite, refusal to the wretched girl, who had staked her last hopes of rescue on him who so obstinately refused to hear what she might have to say.

'But if he will not come to me I will go to him,' she cried, after a few minutes' reflection, 'he shall listen to me. I will make one effort at least to save my father and myself from

further guilt. Oh! the world improves no one; he is the same man who seven years ago sympathized with me about my mother's death, and yet now he refuses to see me, when an interview might do so much for all. But I will go to him, and if every feeling of his former heart be not obliterated, good will come of this step which I am determined to take.'

Sudden resolutions, unless put immediately into practice, are very rarely carried out; but Dora was in such a state of distracted agony that—any hope, however faint, any straw, no matter how slender, which offered a chance of rescue, was eagerly seized upon. Mr Lesparde she knew could save her, and oh! would he not listen to the voice of her pleading and be merciful. 'Something of his former nature must be lingering about him still,' she thought, 'and if there be, I shall surely be able to persuade him to yield—at all events, I will try, for he can but refuse.'

And accordingly, when evening came, and the doctor assured her she might leave her father for an hour or two without apprehension, she set out in the quiet twilight, accompanied only by Emily, who had been her nurse, to walk to Orpen. There was a large shop within a few doors of the house where Mr Lesparde lived. 'Emily,' said Dora hurriedly, as she paused before the former, 'go in and buy something—anything—I shall be back directly.'

Perhaps the woman guessed where she was going—perhaps she did not like the idea, and thought her young lady should not in the dusk stir a single step unattended; be this as it may, using the freedom of speech authorized by long service and sincere attachment, she replied, 'Oh! let me go with you, Miss Dora, it is not right for you to go alone.'

'It is quite right, Emily,' returned her young mistress firmly: 'I know what I am about perfectly well; it is what I must do, so wait here for me, and all will be right, at least I trust it may, in time.'

The woman could not remonstrate further, but instead of entering the shop at once she waited at the threshold and watched Dora till the young lady paused and knocked at the door of No. 33, where Emily knew the old Colonel's nephew resided.

‘There’s something very much amiss, I am afraid,’ exclaimed the woman, shaking her head sorrowfully: ‘very much amiss; it’s some work of the master’s, I’m sure; I wish I knew what it is, and that Miss Dora, poor young lady, was not mixed up in it.’

But Miss Delorme having gained admission into the house, which Emily suspected to be her destination, it is needful for us to pass her on the threshold and precede her up the staircase, in order to notice a little more particularly the individual with whom she so earnestly desired an interview.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

ALTHOUGH frequent reference has been made to Mr Edmund Lesparde in the course of preceding chapters, neither his personal appearance nor general character has been much spoken of, nor, indeed, touched upon. Let us now consider both for a few minutes, because for once a good opportunity presents itself, he being at rest, a thing of very rare occurrence in the life of this spoiled child of nature and fortune; for every one likes him, every one is desirous of having him to dinner, every one is delighted to see him, every one would be happy to serve him, and for all these things there are three sufficient reasons: first, Mr Lesparde is rich; secondly, Mr Lesparde is the fashion; thirdly, Mr Lesparde is clever, and can and will do anything—ride, swim, row, shoot, dance, act, flirt, walk, talk, be gay, serious, obliging, anything and everything, in short, to please those with whom he happens to be thrown—not perhaps so much to delight them as to feed his own love of popularity.

For the world, and its society, and its flattery, a course of uninterrupted prosperity, a life of almost unchequered enjoyment, an education more superficial than solid, had not brought out the better, higher part of his nature, which still lay slumbering, still undeveloped; nobody ever desired to see more of him than

the mere surface; it seemed so bright, so agreeable, that no one dreamed of inquiring, 'But is there nothing beyond? nothing of pure gold beneath all this wonderful glitter?' There was indeed; but none of his companions had ascertained the fact; there was none to work the mine—

'And bring its treasures to the light!'

Thus the real goodness of his nature was never brought into play, and the vivacity and politeness of his general manner glossed over and concealed his faults, which were numerous enough, as the faults of spoiled children, whether of parents or of fortune, always are.

Perhaps Mr Lesparde was not very patient under trial, or very amiable if opposed, but what could the world know of that? it never opposed, it always smiled on him; consequently he never frowned on it. He was not on the whole very liberal, perhaps he was rather selfish; but still, when all was said, there was good at the bottom of his heart, for his faults were more acquired than natural, they were the failings and foibles of an over-indulged, prosperous, petted favourite of fortune.

He had been surely born for better, nobler pursuits than those in which he frittered life away; this was proved by the exhaustless energy with which he pursued even pleasure—never lounging through his days like most other men of fashion, but ever and always rushing on as if matters appertaining to life and death awaited his presence; although, perhaps, the most important question he ever decided was, whether Colonel Foster's horse were better than Mr Wythom's, or if Miss Townsend were a handsomer and more accomplished young lady than Miss Earpe?

He was now, however, as has been said, at rest, sitting alone in his lodgings, in a thoroughly bad temper.

Fortune, in the person of Major Delorme, had at length given him vexation; and he had been for so long completely spoiled by the fickle goddess—that anything like annoyance he found most difficult to bear patiently; and he did not bear it patiently, but chafed, and fretted, and tormented himself about the matter, quite as much as though he and not the unlucky Major had attached a false signature to the bill.



He did not like being involved in such a business with such a man ; the publicity he loved was not exactly that to be acquired by 'Edmund Lesparde examined, and cross-examined,' but he had not the slightest idea of doing what he saw Mr Champion desired he should, and hoped he would do—namely, pay the bill himself, and so settle the business, and relieve Dora and her father from their embarrassments. Do this, he vowed he would not ; what were they to him, that he should lose five hundred pounds for their sakes ? She might be young and pretty, but what did that signify ? the Major might be ill, or he might not ; still, how did the fact concern him ?

Five hundred pounds was a large sum of money—he had never, certainly, heard the common expression, 'that there is a deal of counting in it ;' but though his ears would hardly have admitted such a vulgarism, his straightforward common sense was perfectly conscious of the truism : then why on earth should he, for no conceivable reason, or ultimate benefit accruing directly or indirectly to himself, pay this bill ? He knew if he did, Major Delorme would say he had been frightened into the act—would accuse him of falsehood—*might* throw a slur on his honour ; and with all weaknesses, Mr Lesparde was highly honourable and truly well-principled, and could not endure the bare idea that any one, even such a person as he now imagined, and with great justice, the Major to be, should accuse him in the remotest manner of a mean or ungentlemanlike action : in fact, from beginning to end, first and last, it was a most perplexing, provoking business ; wherefore, with arms crossed on his chest, and brows knit in earnest thought, he reflected about it, and made himself as uncomfortable and unhappy concerning the forgery, as by any stretch of imagination he possibly could ; whilst the light fell upon his strongly-marked and somewhat peculiar features.

Striking they were, and thoughtful and in spite of all the inconsiderate gaiety, as the world deemed it, of his manner, there was a touch of melancholy in his expression. Perhaps his mode of life did not quite satisfy him, although it charmed society. His forehead was broad and massive ; his hair curled closely and thickly upon it ; his eyes were deep-set, and peculiarly searching in their expression—in truth, he could discern more at one quick, earnest glance, than many men could



have discovered in a day; the nose was straight and well formed; whilst the mouth, firm and determined, when closed, was yet capable at times of wearing an expression of peculiar sweetness and gentleness. No one could ever have loved the face, had it not been for that redeeming smile.

His room was handsomely furnished, the whole aspect of the apartment said, as plainly as any words could have done, that its occupant loved comfort and elegance, whilst he disdained luxury and trifles; but his gaze, on the evening in question, never sought the paintings on the walls, nor rested on the statuettes which here and there were disposed so as to relieve the somewhat sombre air of the chamber; no, it remained resolutely fixed on the fire which glimmered on the hearth, although it was in the month of August, seeing therein a tedious law-suit and many an imaginary annoyance beside.

He had accepted an invitation to a party at Lady Nayton's, but was indulging himself in a short reverie before he dressed for the entertainment. He had given strict orders to his servant that he was not to be disturbed, therefore when without ceremony that individual flung open the door, Mr Lesparde exclaimed, 'What now?' in a somewhat angry tone.

'A lady, if you please, sir,' returned the man, with much *empressement* of manner, and, as if the answer contained in itself a perfect volume of explanation and apology, he declined adding more, but ushering the lady in, shut the door after her, and left the visitor and his master to make or renew their acquaintance as best they might.

'Can you spare a few minutes to me, Mr Lesparde, I am very anxious to speak to you?'

He knew it was Dora Delorme before the tones of her low voice fell on his ear; before she flung back her veil and revealed her pale face to him, he knew it was she.

'Miss Delorme!' he exclaimed, in accents of surprise, not unmingled with annoyance. 'Miss Delorme, *you* here!'

'Yes!' she answered gently and sadly, 'you may well be astonished to see me; but since you could not, or rather would not, come to me, I have come to you to speak a few words concerning this most unfortunate business.'

'Miss Delorme,' he said coldly, 'it is not my custom usually to negative a lady's request, or to refuse to listen to

whatever she may wish to say to me, but upon this subject I really must decline to hold any communication with you. If your father has sent you here to try to effect an arrangement, he has forgotten both what is due to himself and his daughter.'

Dora's face flushed as he spoke; but her purpose was not to be shaken by any repulse, by any incivility. He had either purposely or accidentally omitted to place a chair for her; but quietly she took one herself, ere she answered—he still standing:

'You are mistaken; he knows nothing of this visit; I feel sure it is a step he would most strongly disapprove, but I resolved to act for myself, by myself; therefore, saying nothing of my intention to him or any one else, I have come here, forgetful—no, not forgetful, but unmindful of the customs of society, to ask you to save me from the commission of a great sin. I see you do not wish to hear me, but you must, for I will not leave this place till I have told you all: you may think me unfeminine, desperate, mad; if you will only listen to me for a few minutes, it is all I ask.'

What reality is there about intense feeling and earnest truth, which makes itself at once known and felt?

Mr Lesparde had not another stern word to say to her, whom a few brief months—or rather weeks—had changed from a girl—a very beautiful girl—to a quiet, subdued woman.

He resumed his seat, and she accepted the movement as a negative permission to proceed.

'My father—if I understand the matter rightly,' she began, 'being in want of five hundred pounds, requested you to sign your name to a bill which enabled him to get that amount from Mr Champion; you now disclaim all knowledge of the affair, and do not mean interfering to prevent his being tried for forgery—nay, more, you intend to aid the prosecution in some way.'

'I do,' returned Mr Lesparde, obstinately, as if he were steeling himself to refuse any request she might prefer; 'it is not for the value of the money—for although it is undoubtedly a large sum to lose, yet I would willingly pay twice the amount to be able to undo all that has happened; but your father has directly accused me of falsehood, and I am determined at all hazards to vindicate my own honour.'

‘You cannot,’ she returned.

‘I can,’ he replied. ‘I am perfectly well aware that yesterday you supported your father’s assertions. I grieved much to hear you do so, but still I was able to find some excuses for your conduct in the matter; to believe that arguments and entreaties had been used; to imagine that perhaps you credited his tale, and thought mine false. I could wish to forget the words I heard pass your lips—words which can never (at least, so I trust) be repeated by you.’

The cold, dictatorial, excessively charitable tone of this response cut Dora to the heart; pity she knew she deserved, not severe blame like this, tinged as it was with a sort of half-contemptuous, half-righteous compassion, that irritated whilst it pained her. Had he really seemed sorry, to have had any fellow-feeling, any sympathy with and for her trial and her fault, she might not have found sufficient firmness to proceed, but his tone made her feel hopeless—almost desperate, and served her to go on to the end.

‘If the case come to trial,’ she said, without noticing, farther than by a slight increase of colour, his reply; ‘if the case come to trial of course I shall be produced as a witness—’

‘As a witness!’ he repeated; ‘as a witness to what never happened—’

‘I mean to prove,’ she added, still, apparently, unheeding his comments, ‘that you came to the house, dined with my father, that I saw you sign a paper—’

Mr Lesparde looked earnestly at her to discover whether this were merely a threat—a mere bravado, or a settled determination; but her face was now so ghastly pale, the expression it wore one of such intense suffering, that he could not doubt she actually intended doing what she said.

‘Gracious Heavens!’ he exclaimed, ‘do you mean to say you will perjure yourself? for even supposing you believe your father’s assertion that I signed the paper, you are as well aware as I, that you were never present at any such transaction.’

‘I do not think you ever put your name to it,’ she said, very slowly.

‘And yet you persist you absolutely intend to call God to witness that is true which you know to be utterly false.

Miss Delorme, did no one ever teach you the distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil ?'

'I wish I did not so clearly know the straight path from which I have—from which I am deviating ; blindness might, in that case, plead some palliation for the step I have resolved to take ; but I cannot help it ; he is my father, the only thing I have left on earth to love, and I must save him, if you will not.'

In an instant the actual state of the case broke upon Mr Lesparde's mind, the veil of anger and prejudice dropped from his eyes—they were not in league together against him then ; she was a victim as well as he. He saw at a glance the struggles she had endured—the strength and weakness of the girl's character were revealed to him by the light her manner, even more than her words, let in on the subject. He felt perplexed—he was placed in quite a novel position. For years he had regarded women as beautiful, trifling creatures, fitted to grace a ball-room, to spend their time in light accomplishments, in frivolous amusements, in decking their pretty persons in the most exquisite dresses ; he had been their slave, their devoted admirer, he would have travelled twenty miles to procure that sweet song the Honble Miss Julia Nayton was so much charmed with, and quite exhausted himself in searching for a lady's lost fan ; but he had never previously seen a woman in a position of the slightest importance leaning on herself, he had certainly never before been requested to save her from committing a deadly sin.

Yet here was a girl, not quite eighteen, quietly telling him she had resolved, with a perfect knowledge of the consequences, to perjure herself unless he consented to extricate her from her situation. He did not know what to do ; he rose and paced the room ; he wished from his heart she had not come to him, for she had already shaken his resolution, which he previously imagined to be immovable.

Dora never looked at him—she looked straight forward into vacancy. There are times in life when, without being actually insane, persons labour under an excitement nearly akin to madness, and such was her case ; but the very intensity of her despair had the effect of outwardly calming her, and this calm was more wonderful and more impressive to the

man of the world than tears or passionate lamentations could have been.

In effect, though he had felt disappointed with, and much incensed against, Dora on the preceding day, he now respected the pale statue who had come to inform him she was resolved to swear an utter falsehood in perfect consciousness of the fact.

After a few moments he resumed his seat; he meant to reason with her, to try and influence her decision, to endeavour to alter her resolution, though he felt before he commenced he might as well endeavour to stay the wind.

‘Miss Delorme,’ he began, ‘will you just reflect for a few minutes concerning the great sin you say you are willing to commit? You must know that your love for your father, strong though it may be, all-powerful as I fear it is, can never justify such an act.’

‘I do not expect it to justify me,’ said Dora.

Mr Lesparde paused ere he answered.

‘I will tell you what I think I can do in this matter to avert the dreadful catastrophe which seems impending over you. Before Mr Champion, your father accused me of deliberate falsehood, of a cowardly wish to rid myself of an engagement into which I never entered if he will confess to the incorrectness of those assertions, if he will in plain words say the statements he made were not true, I will either pay one half or the whole of the bill when it becomes due. Mr Champion, I know, has no desire to push matters to extremity.’

‘I felt he was a good man,’ said Dora earnestly; ‘but, Mr Lesparde, even your generous offer will not do—I must ask still more.’

‘I fear—’ he commenced.

‘And so do I,’ she hastily interrupted, ‘fear that the boon is far too great to be granted: yet I will try. I came to make a request somewhat similar to that you have anticipated; but my father will never yield: to you, perhaps, he might acknowledge the wrong, but not to Mr Champion—not even to me.’

Once again the old doubt swept across Mr Lesparde’s heart: they must be leaguings against him; ‘they want to gain



all from me, to give up nothing themselves,' he thought; and so coldly answered:

'You surely cannot expect me to lose not only my money, but also my character, which is seriously affected by the charge your father has brought against me. I have said what I will do, and all I will do; you can, if you please, consult Major Delorme on the matter, and come to some resolution concerning it.'

'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'I could not consult him. What could I say? that I believed he had deceived me—that I had told you so—that I had come here—no! he will never confess; but if it would clear you, if you wish it, I will go to Mr Champion; I will unsay what I said yesterday; I will let him know that you spoke truly, I falsely; I—'

'It would be better, much better, for you to endeavour to get your father to do his part at once; as he is the sole criminal, the sole originator of the mischief, he should be the person to suffer; he should be the one to repair it, at least in part.'

'That cannot be,' returned Dora, almost hopelessly; 'I know he—I know we have wronged you; if you had come alone at first, without Mr Champion, matters might now have been different. We have no claim on you of any kind; but, still, I thought, I hoped perhaps, that when I told you how I was placed, you might have pity upon me.'

He made no answer to this appeal: he could not say 'No,' he would not say 'Yes.'

Dora's voice grew weak and low as she proceeded: 'When my mother left her home to marry him, she left behind her the love of every one else on earth. She was only eighteen; and yet her father cursed her in his anger, and never looked upon her face again. She died when she was scarcely thirty; loving, trusting my father to the last. She bade me on her death-bed obey him in everything; cling to him; never desert him; respect and look up to him in all things, for that he could do no wrong. For more than seven years I have kept to the letter of her injunction; and, until four days ago, I believed my parent to be all she imagined.'

'I respected him more, perhaps, before I was undeceived, but, oh! I love him twice as dearly now. I strove to prevent



his doing this great wrong. I prayed to be strengthened in the right: for I did see what was right, clearly—too clearly! Perhaps, even now, I should not have yielded. Perhaps I should have still been struggling between duty and affection; but when this paralysis came, I could think of nothing but him; I felt that, perhaps, my refusal might have caused, or at least hastened, its approach. I thought, if he should die I should never forgive myself, and that it was wrong to give way, wrong to persist. I did not know what to do; and so, when the doctor said any excitement or anxiety might prove fatal, I went to my father and told him I would——’

She paused suddenly in her hurried entreaty, and turning to Mr Lesparde waited for his answer, which came not immediately, however, for though he knew the conclusion of the story, he wished to hear it from her lips.

‘That you would perjure yourself?’ he said inquiringly.

‘No; I expected that would be the end of it; but I merely consented to assert before Mr Champion that I had seen you sign the paper: it was all I was asked to say; but I knew I should have to do a great deal more. I feel so still, unless you will interfere to save me.’

‘What can I do?’ he demanded.

‘Already creditors are pouring in; it will be impossible for my father to pay the enormous sum at present; but if you would only advance it, if you could settle the business, you shall ultimately be no loser—all shall in time be paid, for I believe we have enough to meet our other debts.’

‘Will you, then, undertake to get Major Delorme to acknowledge——’

‘He would die first,’ she quickly returned; ‘when not even this terrible visitation has shaken his determination, at least so far as I can judge, what would? No doubt,’ she added, as if to exculpate him from blame or at least palliate his offence, ‘no doubt he justifies the matter in some way, how I cannot tell; all I do feel sure of is, that he will never confess. Let us leave here—go to some place where we shall not be known, where he will not be annoyed nor tempted, and in time you shall be paid, indeed, indeed you shall.’

He hesitated, and noticing this she continued:

‘I remember, Mr Lesparde, you were once very kind to me—at a time of great sorrow—when I went, after my mother’s death, to stay at the house of your good uncle. I remember how patiently you bore with my grief then; the walks over the peaceful hills: those days, spite of the cloud that had fallen upon me, were quietly happy, and though I know that we are both so changed since then as to be scarcely the same human beings, though I am not a child now, though you have mixed with the world and seen a great deal during the long years that lie between this time and that, yet I thought before I came here that perhaps, as you had felt sorry for me then, you might pity me now; that you would do me this great kindness, that for the sake of the past, for the friendship your uncle bore my father, for the sake of mercy, you would accede to my request. You are very rich and happy now, Mr Lesparde,’ she added, tears starting to her eyes as the memory of those old times came floating back through her soul; ‘you are rich and happy now, you have many friends; but the time may come when these will fade away, or have no charms: it might perhaps then be pleasant to think you had done this good deed and saved one person from a life of perpetual regret.

Her words and her tears at last had conquered him—her task was finished, her work done. The better feelings of his nature, which had for so long been slumbering, were that night awakened—pity they should ever again have slept. Dora and her father were free to depart whithersoever they pleased, for Mr Lesparde had, for the first time in his life, sacrificed his own wishes to benefit one of his fellow-creatures, and that one whom, when a child, he had consoled for the death of her mother. What a long time ago that seemed, how different Dora appeared now—yet how much of her former self remained in her nature still.

‘Your father has deeply wronged me,’ he said, ‘but God forbid I should refuse your request—what you wish I will do. I can arrange the matter with Mr Champion; you must not interfere further in it.’

Dora rose to depart; she could scarcely speak, she felt so thankful, so relieved, yet still so sorrowful, that she thought her heart must break; she tried to articulate a few words of

gratitude, but they were almost unintelligible to Mr Lesparde ; he knew what she meant, however, and that sufficed.

He followed her down-stairs. Seeing him take his hat, she said, 'Do not come with me, pray do not ; a servant, my old nurse, is waiting for me ; I would rather go alone, thank you.'

But he did not heed this request, and walked on in silence with her till she reached the door of the shop where she had left Emily ; there she stopped, and bade him once again good-night.

He stood in the street till he saw the two figures disappear in the distance ; then he followed them till they entered the cottage gate, after which he retraced his steps to his lodgings.

'Shall I call a cab, sir ?' inquired his servant.

'No !' said Mr Lesparde.

'It is past ten, sir,' suggested the man.

'I am not going ; I do not mean to attend *every* ball within fifty miles, I am sick of them. There, don't look so astonished,' he added angrily, 'but go, and be hanged.'

With which command the servant did not think fit to comply, but proceeded forthwith to the housemaid, his confidential friend and adviser, and told her 'he thought his master must either be going to die or get married, for he had been so cross for two or three days past, he really believed he should have to give him warning.'

## CHAPTER XIX.

UNCONSCIOUS of the discussion going on below-stairs, concerning his hasty answer to the servant, who had disturbed his train of thought, Mr Lesparde ascended to his apartment, and flinging himself on a sofa, resumed the meditations which had for some time previously been occupying him.

He was not going to be married, nor yet to die; no considerations of a future state, nor even of a change of state, distracting his attention from the contemplation of present affairs, he was free to devote himself exclusively to the occurrences of the last few days, most especially to the interview that had just taken place.

The result of his musings was not wholly unsatisfactory. He had often thrown shillings to beggars, and subscribed pounds to charities, because it was a bore to refuse, and the fashion to comply, but he had never before given up one feeling or desire of his own to benefit even his dearest friend.

In this instance, however, he had yielded to the promptings of his better nature, to that portion of his character which the world and its pomps and vanities had never called forth, though they might have trampled it under-foot, and dimmed its original brightness considerably.

Until Dora Delorme came he had determined to aid in prosecuting and exposing the forger; and revenge—a feeling most people possess to a certain degree, and delight to gratify in different ways—was pleased at the idea of ruining a man, who had persisted in maligning his character and accusing him of falsehood.

He had found it hard to subdue the wish to clear himself, and expose the baseness of Major Delorme's conduct; he had struggled long between the desire of vengeance, and the pity he felt for the wretched man's daughter; but when the sacrifice was completed, after he had chosen which path to take, and made one long step in the right direction, he experienced a sensation of pleasure unfelt before for years.

I do not mean to say Mr Lesparde's conduct was influenced solely by the knowledge, that it is right to prevent a fellow-creature, if possible, from committing a sin; nor am I certain, that had Dora Delorme been plain in person, unattractive in manner, and uninteresting in all respects, he would have yielded without a much greater struggle than was the case when the petition was earnestly preferred by a young and beautiful girl, whose personal loveliness was heightened by the charms which a refined and cultivated mind, a soft, low, musical voice, and a peculiarly feminine manner, are able to lend even to a face not, critically speaking, handsome.

He had been, even when a boy, singularly impressible to beauty. Some persons are so constituted, as to have an almost painful appreciation of all things lovely in art or in nature—and thus it was with him.

A fine painting; a good piece of sculpture; a noble tree; rare flowers; a glorious landscape; a charming woman—a handsome man: all these produced an impression on him—differing according to the degree of beauty, and to the embellishments it derived from the extraneous aids of circumstance, manner, and cultivation.

But, singular to say, this, in some cases dangerous susceptibility, had proved no snare to him.

Because he admired a pretty woman, 'that was no reason,' he argued, and justly, 'why he should fall in love with her.' A girl with very exquisite features, and a faultless figure, and a graceful, simple way of saying foolish nothings and every-day truisms, might be very silly; and though she made a lovely picture to sit and look at, and a nice partner for a quadrille or a waltz, and was, moreover, possessed of sufficient elegance of manner to render the nonsense she talked, during the descent from the ball to the supper-room, something more than endurable, still Mr Lesparde had not the least idea of relinquishing his liberty, and binding himself by indissoluble bonds to any one he had yet encountered in his progress through life.

He had talent, birth, education, accomplishments, plenty of money, and he was perfectly cognizant of all these advantages, and estimated them, it is only right to add (thankfulness being a virtue) at their *very highest value*.

When he met a woman possessed of all the cardinal virtues, beauty, worth, mind, sense, birth, education, agreeable, fascinating manners, he would then perhaps *think* of marrying her; meanwhile, he could and would remain as he was, a much-sought-after, much-thought-of, agreeable bachelor; somewhat worldly it is true; a little given to flirting, perhaps, and a great deal to talking; but who had never made the remotest progress to a near acquaintance with the little mischievous, uncertain god, who does such damage on the face of the earth, who wounds hearts sorely, if he never breaks them, and is called by those who know most about the urchin, Cupid.

Mr Lesparde had no friendship for him, and he did not desire to have; he considered great sentiment in the main a humbug, and so undoubtedly it is. Had he been of a romantic, or even of a not desperately anti-romantic (if the expression be allowable), disposition, he might have managed to fall in love with Dora Delorme, but for the reasons stated above, he did not: he had done her a great kindness it is true, having been influenced to the act not merely by her beauty, but also by a feeling of pity for one so young, who was thrown into a perilous position from which he alone could rescue her, but love her he did not: had any one put the question to him he would have said, 'that would be too absurd;' his meaning being, that the idea of his 'getting up an especial affection for any one;' he who had travelled from Dan to Beersheba, and found all barren; or, in other words, to speak more correctly, he who had journeyed from London to Paris, Madrid, Naples, Venice, and Vienna; from house to house, from ball-room to ball room, and thought all pleasant and agreeable enough; but seen no one to bestow his affections upon; no one, in fact, to care particularly about, or to remember ten days or two hours after he had been parted from her—after all this, to fall in love with a pretty country child, as he contemptuously called Dora, a forger's daughter, that 'would have been too absurd indeed!'

But still he did feel very sorry for her, very sorry; and as he thought about the words which had dropped from her he remembered she had spoken of repaying the money. 'No, no!' he cried, 'she shall not have that mill-stone, in addition to her father, hanging about her neck; I will go to her to-morrow and



tell her so ; but first I must see Champion and get the business finally settled.'

And having arrived at this resolution, he went to bed and slept quietly, whilst all Lady Nayton's guests were wondering what could possibly have become of him to cause his absence.

Poor aristocrats ! in the simplicity of their hearts they never dreamed that his absence was induced by the story of an insignificant girl ; that he had remained at home to think about her affairs, and gone to rest less bored, and far more happy, than if he had been a 'star' in Lady Nayton's hemisphere. Every individual who composed her set was, indeed, a fixed star of the very first magnitude, for her ladyship was very particular as to whom she received ; perhaps the reason of this being that Lord Nayton was almost indifferent to the standing of his guests : opposites we know marry, and then never subsequently agree on any point, excepting in an endless wish that they had never agreed to go to the altar together ; and thus Lady Nayton, who had been a *parvenu's* daughter, was desperately exclusive, whilst her lord, who traced back to the Saxon kings, was willing to welcome any one with a gentlemanly manner and an honest heart.

Yea, truly : opposites agree to marry, and marry to disagree ; and so Lady Nayton's circle was composed of diamonds, and pearls, and emeralds, all common gems being excluded from it ; and yet Mr Lesparde could stay away, and could go to sleep, and not feel dismayed to think of all he had missed by not letting his servant call a cab, which might have conveyed him to Nayton Hall.

'Mr Champion had gone from home for a few days.' Such was the piece of information the clerk communicated to Mr Lesparde, when that gentleman called at the bank on the following morning.

'Well !' he exclaimed, very philosophically—though, in reality, feeling angry, 'there is little wisdom in being annoyed about what cannot be helped, and a few days' delay will not signify much ; I can call on Miss Delorme towards the end of the week, for there is no use in going to tell her not to mind repaying the money until I have actually advanced it ; that would indeed be premature ;' and he smiled somewhat bitterly

at the idea, and returned, with a face a degree graver than usual, to his ordinary pursuits and occupations—but he did not take quite so much interest in them as before, for they merely served to kill time until Mr Champion's return.

He called almost every day during the remainder of the week to see if he had come, but the answer to all his inquiries being invariably briefly, 'No, sir, not yet,' the old week passed away, and a new one was entered upon, without the person he so much desired to see making his appearance.

'If he do not come back soon,' murmured Mr Lesparde, in confidence to his tea-cup one fine Tuesday morning, as he 'got through' his breakfast and his thoughts together; 'if he do not come back soon, the bill will be due before I have seen him; but as they say Delorme is going to leave the cottage, and that there are executions in the house, why I shall put off my visit no longer, but see Miss Delorme forthwith, whether Mr Champion return or not.'

And as he uttered the word 'not,' he broke his egg-shell in a most emphatic manner—almost immediately after which performance the door opened, and in walked the person who had been the principal subject of the above soliloquy.

'My dear sir, I am so glad to see you,' he exclaimed, stretching an eager hand to the banker, 'you are the very person I most wanted at this minute; I was thinking of you.'

'Humph! rather an uncomplimentary speech if the old adage be true,' replied Mr Champion, a bright smile lighting up his face; 'but the truth is, Jackson said you had been inquiring for me almost every day since my departure, and so not to lose time, and by way of a return for your frequent visits, here I am.'

'Welcome at all times, trebly so now,' returned Mr Lesparde; 'you have not breakfasted, I hope.'

'Yes.'

'Provoking; but of course I might have remembered eleven o'clock never finds you dawdling over that meal—see what it is to have some imperative employment.'

'And have you none?' demanded his friend; 'I thought

you never had a moment unoccupied ; scarcely an hour at your own disposal.'

'I meant a useful employment,' said Mr Lesparde, reddening a little ; 'you are aware I have no vocation but pleasure ; no end in existence but to kill time ; no aim in life but to pass it.'

'Well, if we all went to first causes we might all tell a similar tale, or pretty nearly so,' returned Mr Champion, 'the only difference being as to the *means*, for the end we all pursue is pretty nearly the same ; one man passes his life in making money, another in striving for fame, a third in hunting out old coins and deciphering ancient hieroglyphics, a fourth in making laws, a fifth in expounding or administering them, a sixth in banking, a seventh in pleasure ; go back to first causes, our end is all the same—to kill time ; to get through life somehow.'

'Do not talk in that way,' exclaimed Mr Lesparde almost vehemently, 'I love to think that there are many who have high, noble aims in existence : you have, for instance, though your words would almost induce a belief that you think every one is just alike ; that—'

'No, no,' interrupted Mr Champion hastily ; 'some turn the gift of being to a good, others to a bad purpose ; what I meant to say was this, that if every one contemplated life as you do, if the matter were looked closely into it would be found the thief and the philanthropist had one common thought in common, that of killing time ; but there is a wide distinction between them nevertheless—the latter flings good actions and kind thoughts at the head of the old enemy, the former stolen purses and chests of plate. But why talk of these things ; the best way to get through existence after all, I conscientiously believe, is for each one among us to discharge his or her duty well and faithfully, according to the position and light and opportunities which have been assigned to every son and daughter of Adam ; to do as little harm and as much good as lies within our power ; and leaving theories and repinings and discontents alone, to trust all the rest in the hands of God, who created the world, the inhabitants thereof, and hath ordered all things wisely and well.'

'Which last arrangement of Providence, whenever we meddle with it, we contrive to upset,' said Mr Lesparde with some bitterness.

‘Nay, nay,’ interposed Mr Champion kindly. ‘With your prospects, at your time of life, born in the nineteenth century, it is absurd to hear you speak in this way. Let me know what has occurred to annoy you.’

‘Nothing has particularly occurred to annoy me,’ replied Mr Lesparde, ‘unless indeed your long absence from Orpen.’

‘Well, my dear fellow, that has ceased to be an annoyance now, for here I am : what do you want with me?’

‘To speak to you about Major Delorme’s bill,’ rejoined the younger man.

‘Precisely : I thought it must be something about it. I hoped it, in fact ; you have seen him, I suppose?’ This was said inquiringly.

‘No,’ returned Mr Lesparde.

‘Ah, well : heard from him, it is all the same.’

‘Nor yet heard from him.’

‘I do not like to listen to these replies. I was in hopes—’

‘Oh! you need not be uneasy,’ interrupted Mr Lesparde ; ‘the business is settled : the money will be forthcoming.’

‘Thank God for that,’ broke out the banker, looking as pleased as though some one had left him a fortune ; ‘but where is it to come from?’

‘Nay,’ said Mr Lesparde, ‘if the bill be met, is not that sufficient for you?’

‘Quite ; I see how it is—I knew how it would be ; I felt sure of it when I told you to think over the matter, and yet you are a man who asserts he has no higher aim in life than to get through so many years at a given pace : oh! Edmund Lesparde, there is goodness, and nobleness, and generosity about you, if you would only give yourself fair play, only do yourself justice.’

Perhaps the heart of the person so addressed whispered he did not deserve such unqualified praise : he reflected how long Dora had been compelled to plead ere he had replied to her petition favourably—he felt his friend jumped to kind and charitable conclusions too rapidly, for which reasons he rejoined a little sadly :

‘Give credit, Mr Champion, where credit is due—not to me,

certainly ; there is only one person whose conduct throughout this business is perfectly worthy of commendation—she has been made a victim ; her father would have blasted her life. Whenever you think of the matter, whenever you think of him as a villain and a forger, think also of his daughter—give blame to the one, pity, admiration, sympathy to the other.’

Mr Champion looked earnestly at the speaker : he read the whole story, or at least the mere facts thereof, from his open countenance. For a minute he spoke no word in answer, but then he said, ‘It was a bad business ; thank God, she is saved !’

‘And by me,’ mentally added Mr Lesparde.

‘So ends the matter,’ he said to Mr Champion, ‘we will never speak of it again.’

‘Better not,’ acquiesced the banker, who felt as if some great weight had been removed from his heart, ‘far better not.’

During the course of that day Mr Lesparde obtained possession of the forged bill.

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## CHAPTER XX.

It was little short of miraculous to consider how the news of Major Delorme’s illness spread like wild-fire from creditor to creditor, from mouth to mouth ; the serving of writs, the running of bailiffs, the looking after mortgages and securities, was something wonderful to behold.

The crash had come at last, both to body and estate. He was struck by paralysis ; his effects were seized upon ; men were ‘put in possession ;’ people began to wonder how much he could pay in the pound. Mr Bradshaw heard, and marvelled who would turn out to have been the unlucky lender of the five hundred pounds ? He presumed the Major had coaxed it from somebody. In short, there was curiosity, rush, hurry, anxiety,

tumult, around and about the little cottage, and inside of it too, excepting one room kept sacred to the invalid. Dora watched by him there, whilst he formed plans for the future.

It was on the morning after her visit to Orpen that Major Delorme suddenly exclaimed—

‘I wish to heaven we could leave this!’

‘And why can we not?’ she exclaimed.

‘Oh! till this bill——’

‘Mr Lesparde means to pay it,’ said Dora quietly.

‘He does?’ exclaimed Major Delorme. ‘He does? Why? How do you know?’

‘Because he told me so,’ she replied.

‘And why?’ he demanded.

‘I said that otherwise I should *swear* to the signature if the case came to trial.’

A feeling of bounding exultation swept through the wretched man’s heart as he heard these words; *he* was safe; no felon’s fate awaited him now, no doubtful evidence, no disgraceful end. Mr Lesparde had been frightened into compliance; he had sinned, he had conquered, he was *safe*.

But this sensation lasted only for a moment: how did it come that Mr Lesparde had yielded so readily? that, without remonstrance, or struggle, or apparent anger, he had permitted himself to be vanquished, to be cheated out of five hundred pounds? in plain words, how had Dora accomplished their deliverance? He looked into her face to see, and for once the soft truthful eyes were averted; there was a secret in them; something he could not inquire into, something she would not tell; knowledge of evil had sown distrust between them, never again, no never, could they feel quite the same to each other as of old; the father’s heart turned coldly from his child, for although she had rescued him he dared not ask her how.

From thenceforth their relative positions were altered; he could not bear the change, it was agony to his vain, proud, self-sufficient, obstinate nature.

Until that evening, when her eyes were fully opened to sin and sorrow, she had leaned on him, trusted to him, confided in him, but now she had learnt his weakness and her strength; she was willing to prop him up indeed, but could cling no more



for support to one who she saw was unable to stand erect himself.

She loved him more, but respected him less; he loved her less, but respected her more; he felt she could do without him. He had plunged madly into evil, dragging her down with him; she had saved both by some means, and having nothing to do but to let himself be pulled back to land, he did so, even whilst he felt angry at the gentle hand which had proved so powerful to deliver; he was jealous, indignant; she had burst at once from leading-strings; she had spoken, and acted, and thought, and struggled for herself; thenceforth, child or plaything, she could never seem more.

She was superior to him; their former relative positions were now reversed; it was all caused by his own act, by his own extravagance, by his own folly and wickedness; but these considerations only made his anger the greater. Why should she be better than he? why should she, by her firm goodness, make his weak principles appear trebly weaker by contrast? Love on the one side, respect on the other, these two things, with confidence on both, were blighted between them; the curse which wrong always brings with it, hung over the house, lay darkly on the hearts of parent and child: said I not truly that the pretty cottage amid the flowers was never again to be a happy home to Dora Delorme.

But he was free to leave Orpen: the world 'was all before him where to choose his place of rest,' if rest were a thing he might ever again look for in life; he could go where he liked when he liked, and go he determined he would: he felt as though in quitting Orpen he were quitting a place infected with the plague. Yes, there was not a moment to be lost; there were executions in the house; the very first day the doctor would permit him to rise, he would go—where?

He thought about that too: the whole plan was considered and matured in a few minutes. Then he spoke to Dora in a changed manner, in a changed voice, as follows:—

'So he has thought better of it, has he? and he is not going to aid in prosecuting me—or to deny his signature—or to persist in accusing me of forgery; so much the safer for him. Now, Dora, we will go to London. I do not want to stay a cripple and a beggar amongst those who have known me

under more prosperous circumstances. We will go at once to London.'

'Dear papa, you are not well enough,' she remonstrated.

'Dora, do not dictate to me,' he impatiently returned. 'Surely I ought to know how I feel, better than it is possible for you to do. You cannot possibly imagine I am going to remain here, and see the furniture auctioned before my eyes. I suppose that now because I am disabled, and weak, and altered, you do not care for me, and mean to consult your own pleasure and inclinations without any reference to mine.'

Dora's eyes filled with tears; she felt the reproach was most unjust, for so far from considering her own wishes, had she not sacrificed every feeling of her heart to benefit him? but she repressed her emotion.

'He does not mean to be unkind,' she mentally exclaimed; 'he is weakened mentally and bodily, he cannot really mean what he says;' and so she resolved to humour him, as though he were a sickly child, and to bear with his fevered irritable remarks just as she might with the fretful exclamations of some over-indulged pet of a household.

'I have no wish to remain here,' she said; 'anywhere you choose to reside will of course be agreeable to me; all I desire is that you may be well—all I fear is that so long a journey may make you ill.'

He was touched by her tone; but not choosing to evince the feeling, returned, 'Well, well, we shall hear what the doctor says. Meantime you may make any preparation you deem best for our departure, for though it is probable we shall start much sooner, I am determined on one thing, namely, that this day week shall not see me here, so now do what I tell you;' and the irritable, jealous being sank back upon his pillow, resolved still to maintain his authority, and to exact obedience, and make his daughter do from thenceforth what he chose.

In this instance she did not feel the slightest inclination to dispute his commands; she longed to get away—to leave behind her that little place which once had seemed a paradise; but where now the trail of the serpent was visible to her at every turn. She longed to be far—far away from Orpen, from those who knew anything of them. She wished

to make money—she felt she should never have a moment's peace of mind till the debt was repaid—she longed even more earnestly than her father to be gone, for he merely desired to leave behind him unpleasant recollections, and places, and people, who recalled disagreeable subjects to memory—while she, in addition to all this, looked forward to a change of abode as the first step towards carrying out her project—the object of her life.

Days went by; she packed up the few things they were to take with them; she had completed most of the arrangements for their departure—the following evening was to find them miles from Orpen. She was thinking sadly, sorrowfully of the past—fearfully and yet hopefully of the future, when Emily announced to her that Mr Lesparde 'desired to see her.'

'I cannot see him,' returned Dora hurriedly. 'Tell him,' she added, 'that I hope he will excuse my not going to him, as I am preparing for our departure.'

'I will write a note,' said Mr Lesparde, after a moment's reflection; and the servant, first placing a portfolio, pen, and ink before him, left the visitor to his own reflections.

They were not agreeable: as he passed through the hall, he had seen a couple of bailiffs installed as temporary owners of the mansion; and somehow, when leaning his head on his hand, he thought of all the little secrets and recesses of a private house, being thus revealed to the eyes of strangers; of the possessors being almost jostled from the thresholds of their own homes. When he recalled to mind the appearance the dwelling had presented on the evening he dined there, and the desolate, deserted aspect it now wore, a chill feeling of regret, and a very sincere one of sympathy, arose in the heart of the man of the world.

A small, highly-finished miniature lay on the table before him; he took it up, and beheld the portrait of a lady, of about twenty; he could not be mistaken—she must have been Dora's mother; the likeness to her daughter was striking, but the face wanted power.

It wore a sweet, dreamy, placid expression; but the absence of a strong mind had, by some inexplicable process of nature, and the skill of the artist, been conveyed to and revealed on

the ivory ; still, in feature, it might have passed for Dora—the eyes were neither so large nor so dark, it is true—the hair was many shades lighter ; the character of the countenance was not so firm, perhaps, as that of Dora ; but in spite of great differences, and much dissimilarity, it was very like her. Mr Lesparde laid the miniature once again on the table, and commenced his letter.

When he concluded, he rang the bell ; and intrusting the missive into Emily's keeping, desired her to give it into Miss Delorme's own hands, which the faithful nurse promised to do ; then feeling that a longer stay in the much-changed abode could scarcely seem otherwise than an intrusion, he moved somewhat reluctantly towards the door.

'When is your master going?' he asked, pausing ere he turned the handle.

'To-morrow morning, sir,' answered the woman, with tears in her eyes.

'And Miss Delorme of course with him.'

'Yes, sir ; poor young lady ! she has to leave all, house, and friends, and everything behind her. Poor Miss Dora !'

Before Mr Lesparde went, he placed a couple of sovereigns in the hands of the bailiffs, requesting them at the same time to be as civil and quiet as possible in the discharge of their duty ; and then, with a sadder heart than perhaps he had known before for years, he turned from the door of that once happy home.

It appeared to him as he went through the garden that the very flowers hung down their heads, as though they were already drooping and dying ; indeed, such was actually the case, some days of scorching weather having dried up and parched the ground : they were perishing for want of refreshing rain.

He closed the gate behind him, and casting a wistful glance at a room where the blinds were drawn closely down, he went sadly from the place, and walked slowly back to Orpen.

It was about noon on the following day that, walking out from his lodgings, he encountered a man who had lived long in Major Delorme's service.

'Note for you, sir,' said that individual, touching his hat, and presenting Mr Lesparde with a very small epistle

superscribed in a most tremulous hand to E. Lesparde, Esq. ; who though taking it eagerly from the messenger, retained it still unopened while he inquired—

‘Major Delorme gone?’

‘Yes, sir ; and Miss Dora and the servant you know, sir—Emily.’

‘Where are they gone?’ pursued his questioner.

‘I do not know positively, sir : I asked Emily, but she would not tell me. Miss Delorme had me help to carry down the trunks, but there was no direction on them ; I think, however, that the Major meant to travel to London.’

‘Indeed ; how did he seem before his departure?’

‘Rather better, sir ; he thought he could never get away fast enough.’

‘And Miss Delorme?’

‘She wished to be away too, I believe, but she seemed in great grief for all that. Emily said that the very minute she and the master had talked over the matter and settled to go, Miss Delorme set on and packed up the few things the men in charge would let them take ; and before she went she gave up her watch and the Major’s, and her very rings and everything, to the bailiffs. She did not go into one of the rooms ; to have seen how she looked at the doors as she passed them, you would almost have thought a corpse was lying inside of them ; she just took a small bunch of flowers out of the garden, and seemed as if her heart was breaking while she gathered them—and—and—that was all, sir.’

Quite enough too, for the man had frequently appeared as though about to break down in his narrative. Mr Lesparde made no remark on this detail, or volunteered a single comment on it, but dismissing the messenger with a gratuity, re-entered his lodging, and when he reached his apartment, broke the seal of the envelope.

As he took out and opened the enclosure, a bank note for a large amount dropped on the carpet.

He stooped, picked it up, then read the note, but when he concluded there was an unusual flush and look of annoyance upon his face. After a few minutes’ consideration, he went in search of Mr Champion.



‘Do you know anything of this?’ he asked, producing the bank note.

Mr Champion’s face became red when he beheld it, but he made no reply.

‘Ah, I see you do!’ resumed Mr Lesparde. ‘It came into my possession through a misconception; let me now return it to its rightful owner. Said I not justly yesterday morning—“Give credit unto whom it is due,”—most assuredly not unto me, and yet still you see the halo of your good actions falls around my head.’

He spoke this with an attempt at carelessness, which ill concealed some degree of annoyance.

‘It is most provoking,’ said Mr Champion candidly.

‘Very!’ returned Mr Lesparde, ‘being detected in doing a kind act of which your heart hardly wished your mind to be conscious; it is provoking, but after all, believe me, not so much so as to feel you have been the cause of frustrating a friendly intention, and thanked for a piece of thoughtfulness which never originated with nor was carried out by you.’

‘Nay, my dear fellow,’ returned the banker, ‘what is this trifle to—’

‘Not much, I grant,’ interrupted Mr Lesparde, ‘in a mere pecuniary point of view, but the considerate kindness is everything. Of how much pleasure we deprive ourselves and others by not thinking. I believe the first lesson parents should teach their children is—“Study the feelings of others.”’

‘Lesparde,’ said Mr Champion, smiling kindly, ‘if you develop as much during the remainder of your life as you have during the past week, I believe we shall have you canonized as St Edmund of Orpen.’

‘No, truly,’ replied the other, relapsing into his usual manner, ‘I am not holy enough to become a saint, or obstinate enough to play the martyr; what we say under moments of excitement or after witnessing some great sorrow must not be taken as a sample of our every-day conversation; so now having done with that unfortunate Major Delorme and his daughter, and returned your note with an honesty which I think deserves a reward, as the mistake would never have been discovered but for my confession, let us change the subject, and talk of something else.’



‘Suppose we choose the topic of this morning,’ returned Mr Champion somewhat sadly; ‘the auction of the Major’s effects—’  
 ‘Are they to be sold at once?’ inquired Mr Lesparde.

The banker took up the paper, and pointed to an advertisement setting forth that the household furniture, paintings, books, plate, musical instruments, horses, and so forth, were to be disposed of upon an early day, at the pretty cottage Major Delorme had bought and decorated for his dying wife.

Oh! to think of how the rude world goes in and scatters all the household treasures, never bestowing a thought on the breaking hearts that pass the threshold, sighing to leave behind the inanimate objects hallowed by time and affection, and old cherished recollections.

Is there on earth a much sadder spectacle than that presented by a house in which a sale of furniture is going on? Do people who make a practice of attending such auctions rush to public executions also? Is it not something of the same feeling which takes human beings to both?

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## CHAPTER XXI.

ALONE in London—a unit amongst the millions—a drop in the ocean—a single grain of sand amidst the multitudes of human beings who compose that vast mass—the population of an interminable, never-ending, always beginning, ever growing, far spreading, giant city!

Alone, not merely in England’s mighty metropolis, but on the difficult, barren road of life—alone, or worse than alone, at eighteen, *Dora* Delorme found herself. Her household gods, the treasures enshrined in her heart, were shattered or changed; a home forsaken; a father dishonoured; the idol she had almost worshipped grovelling in the dust of shame.

She pitied, she loved; but she could never again raise him to the imaginary pinnacle he had occupied in former days. Support, nor stay, nor comfort, he could never be more.

How mournful a thing it is to stand amid the wreck of life's and youth's bright hopes; amid that sudden, awful, crushing wreck which comes so soon, alas! to some.

The brightness of existence to a fortunate few is only chequered by showers: the morning of the lives of some is bright—too bright, perhaps, to last: to others dark; in such case the shadow generally rests on them for ever. Dora's was the bright morning; then a deluge of cares and tears and sorrows. With regard to her future lot, this tale must speak, as it progresses, for itself.

She was not wholly without means; but an invalid parent, the every-day necessities and demands of life, and a debt of five hundred pounds, are exorbitant creditors, ever taxing to the utmost health and thought and strength; still Dora was one whose capabilities developed as necessity demanded, and rose with every occasion for exertion. She was young, it is true, and unaccustomed to depend solely on herself; still she had energy and patience, and the will and the steady perseverance requisite to work out any project which she proposed unto her own heart.

Nevertheless it was a sad position; the bloom and brightness of life had vanished. A rude shock having brushed the fresh beauty of existence away, nothing could ever bring it back again, and she had no alternative left but to struggle on alone with a bruised heart, sad memories, firm resolves, and the broken idol who had once been a respected parent.

Perhaps there was something else in the way of remembrance which she carried away with her from her childhood's home; something which she called gratitude; but the precise nature of which she was not cognizant herself; something it had been a pity any one had told her the meaning of: something which lay sleeping in her soul, like moonlight slumbering on the face of the waters, so quietly, so brightly, so tranquilly, that she was unconscious of its actual presence: she felt there was a recollection in her heart; she knew it was right there should be one; she called it gratitude—and why might it not have been?

They had met—and parted: that was all which was apparent to stranger eyes—or hers.

And why should we, who chance to know more of her

feelings than she did herself, penetrate beyond the surface and drag that secret out to daylight, and expose it to public gaze? Truly there is no necessity for the act; let the matter be forgotten; let the vague secret lie there, as it is scarce likely that she, Dora Delorme, can ever have further claim or interest in the wealthy man of fashion; her lot from thenceforth was to endure, and his as heretofore to enjoy.

Is there amongst my readers one who, having been reared amid the pleasant sights and sounds of the country, has known what it is suddenly to be transplanted by the rude hand of adversity or necessity into the dirty, noisy, contaminating atmosphere of a town?

Not into that portion of a town tenanted by wealth and surrounded by luxury, but into that far more extensive part where those dwell who are compelled, either by the pressure of circumstances or the proximity of business, to live in the midst of narrow streets, wearisome sounds, unattractive sights; in the midst of all most trying to the mind—most injurious to the body—most irksome to the soul.

Instead of being wakened in the glorious summer mornings, when the sun is streaming over the hills, and the leaves are dancing and glittering in his light, by the wild, thrilling songs of birds, and starting from sleep to gaze over broad fields and waving woods, whilst the perfume of newly-mown hay and meadow-sweet is wafted by the gentle south wind into your chamber, you are aroused from a dream of pleasant scenes, left far, far behind on the road of life, by some of the hundred and one calls—or rather shrieks—to be heard at all hours, from day-break till late at night, in the streets of a populous town.

You rise and look out at a dreary prospect of roofs and chimneys, and wonderful inventions for curing smoke, and telling how the wind blows; and you can see into your neighbour's yard, and note the few fowls that wander disconsolately through it; and you become cognizant also of the existence of a child, who wears a pinafore, which possibly may, at some remote period, have been white, but which constant washing in town water, and drying in town air, has changed into a dusky yellow, and very speedily you arrive at the conclusion that he has eluded his mamma's observation, to the end that he may exercise his

ingenuity in tormenting a diminutive specimen of the canine race, who lives principally in a barrel, and who looks as though he, too, had grown lean and pale—if a dog's colour be susceptible of such a change—from perpetually seeing nothing above his head but smoke, and nothing beneath his feet but flags and paving stones.

Languidly and sadly, poor countryman, you note these things, and then your thoughts turn back to the old dog who came bounding through the dewy fields at early morning to lick your hands, and rub his old shaggy head lovingly against you ere he dashed off again through the clover and the coppice; and that weary feeling, so well and pithily denominated 'home-sickness,' steals over your soul—although, perchance, those dearest to you on earth are gazing at the same sights, and hearing the same sounds from day to day.

It is not indeed a longing to revisit any home now in existence which comes across your spirit; it is a strong desire to make a new one resembling the old near to the village where you were born; which your town acquaintances, little dreaming that the tenderest and happiest memories of existence are associated with its name, inform you in an easy supercilious sort of way, 'is not much of a place.'

Ah me! you came to the haunts of men to push your fortune; perhaps left home and friends and love and kindness behind you to make a few pounds more, to become rich; you may find, ere twenty years have familiarized you to all which now seems unendurable, that more joy was brought to your heart by the song of birds, the rushing of the rapid stream, the rustling of the wind amongst the trees, the pleasant sound of the mower's scythe cutting swiftly through the long grass, the skates on the frozen pond, the whizzing of the snow-ball cleaving the frosty air, than can ever be accomplished by the clink of guineas in the midst of a busy, bustling city.

And in the midst of London, mighty London, prince amongst cities, heart of a great nation, once again we meet with Dora Delorme; fresh from green fields and waving woods, we meet with her after her journey, and the above long digression, looking for lodgings wherein to find shelter and peace.

I have my doubts as to whether, with regard to London

apartments, cheapness and cleanliness are words synonymous ; but in a general way have none in reference to 'dearness and dirt.' Why this should be it is impossible to say : there are exceptions to every rule, yet Dora Delorme, after some weary explorations, began to think there was none in this case : no hope for her purse, and very little for her ideas of what a new home should be.

'We must contrive to find something respectable, quiet, and cheap,' she had said to her nurse, as they went forth in their foray on the morning after their arrival ; and Emily acquiesced in the propriety of the arrangement.

How is it that strangers so rarely hit on 'the right places' ? there are plenty of comfortable rooms to be had at reasonable prices in London, but somehow new-comers never stumble upon them ; they are difficult to find, doubtless, but why more difficult than others it is beyond my philosophy to tell, so let us return to Dora and her companion.

'We will go in here,' said the former at length ; 'surely in this dingy street they cannot be expensive ;' and accordingly in they went.

'We wish to look at your apartments,' commenced Dora, addressing a mass of silk, lace, curls, bows, and flowers ; which being endowed with a very sharp voice, returned :

'Certainly, madam ; will you walk up-stairs ? these,' she added, flinging open the door of the drawing-room, 'these : this apartment, two bed-rooms, and small lumber-room are most desirable, and so very cheap, and in *such* a locality.'

Dora glanced around at the 'desirable' apartments, where the dust was only a degree less perceptible than the dirt, where tawdry furniture was disposed with a ludicrous attempt at fashion, where the blinds were crooked and the mirrors cracked, and the chairs unsteady, and—

'What is the price ?' she asked.

'If you find your own linen and coals, ma'am, *only* four guineas a week.'

If a thunderbolt had fallen on Dora she could not have been more amazed.

'For these ?' she involuntarily exclaimed.

'Yes, ma'am,' said the landlady, with a smirk of ineffable satisfaction, 'it seems very little, don't it ? in fact, my usual



terms are four guineas and a half, and I have got five ; but to secure respectable tenants, for I am most particular, I have named a very low figure at once.'

'I am afraid,' said Dora, 'that even at that price we could not afford—'

'Should you want them for a permanency?' inquired the owner.

'Most probably ; but——'

'Well, if you took them for six months certain, you should have them—yes—let me see—you should for that period at three pounds fifteen a week.'

'Still far too high,' returned Dora, moving towards the door.

'You will get nothing cheaper in a respectable locality, nothing that you could live in. Now I know,' she added impressively, 'that a few doors lower down, they let their rooms at four pounds per week—not for a permanency ; and I dare say for six months would say three ten ; but they are so dirty—' and the silk sleeves were raised towards Heaven as if invoking a curse on those who neglected the study of that which is next to godliness.

'If they be dirtier than these,' thought Dora, but she merely repeated that the terms were too high.

'Well, suppose we say at once three pounds ten, and that is what I never let them at before, and I know you will get nothing at the same price anywhere in London. Shall we close at three pounds ten?'

'I—I had no idea lodgings were so dear,' stammered the girl, who did not know how to leave ; 'we could not take—'

'Dear!' responded the landlady ; 'dear ! these are uncommonly cheap—uncommon—'

'Perhaps for the locality,' commenced Dora, deprecatingly.

'For the locality !' the woman burst forth, 'for any locality ; let me tell you, madam, there are not such apartments to be seen in London. What is three guineas and a half a week for them? Nothing—literally nothing!'

'But,' said Dora, vainly essaying to reach the door, which was resolutely guarded by the lady with the curls ; 'but if we cannot afford to pay that amount?'

Why, you will get nothing in London under it ; nothing—



‘Still, Miss Delorme, I think we might try,’ interposed Emily, perceiving that her young mistress was not quite competent to deal with the landlady, who entertaining, like many another landlady, the idea that she was conferring a compliment on society by letting lodgings, seemed determined to impress the fact upon their unwilling understandings. ‘Still, Miss Delorme, I think we might try.’

‘Try, if you like,’ said the other, flinging open the door, and pointing to the stairs with an air which said, ‘Descend them at your peril.’ ‘Try if you like; I know you will get nothing equal to these; it is nothing to me if you take them or not. I have fifty applications the moment they are unoccupied, but it is not every one I care to have in my house. It is not to get my rooms taken that I tell you this; thank goodness, I have independent means, and am above any necessity to let apartments; I merely do so because the house is a little larger than I require. I know you will repent not securing these rooms at once, and that will be always—’

‘I fear—I cannot—’ began Dora, literally terror-stricken with the woman’s vehemence and volubility.

‘I do not want to press you, ma’am; oh, no,’ broke in the other, with an air of offended dignity; ‘I only thought that when you said you required lodgings mine might suit; I thought you would probably be desirable inmates. I know any one could live with me; but as you do not appear willing to give such *very* reasonable terms, I cannot press you—as I said before, I can live without the rooms; I could maintain this establishment if I never got a sixpence of rent. It is quite a matter of choice to me, quite; therefore I am very particular, very, and—and I hope you will not regret not securing them.’

‘Thank you,’ said Dora, ‘I am sorry to have given you so much trouble.’

‘Trouble, not the least; I was not at all engaged: we must expect trouble occasionally without profit; it is the same with all who sacrifice themselves for the public; you will meet with nothing at such a price, I know.’

‘Possibly not quite so—so desirable,’ politely returned Dora,

‘You will meet with nothing you can reside in,’ maintained the landlady, ‘but perhaps after you have gone a little further we shall see each other again; now this evening, I do not think

it extremely probable the rooms would be let before this evening.'

'Well, if we don't find anything to suit,' said Dora, speaking and breathing more freely as she reached the bottom of the stairs, and saw a possibility of escaping.

'Ah! I know you will come back; I should advise you to do so: the house is never different, always just as you see it now in every respect; you will meet with nothing of a similar description in London.'

'I should fervently hope not, Miss Dora,' said Emily, when they found themselves once again in the street; 'such a woman, such a house, such a tongue!'

'But what are we to do?' naturally inquired her mistress.

'We had better go to some other part not quite so dear; we shall never get lodgings here I am greatly afraid.'

'Yes,' replied the young lady, 'but we know nothing of London, or where to go, or what to do.'

'I have heard, miss, whenever you want to know anything you should ask a policeman; they can tell about everything.'

'Well, here is one; ask him,' returned Dora, and accordingly her nurse accosted that functionary respectfully with—

'If you please, sir, is this street very genteel?'

'Wery,' he solemnly returned, as if its gentility oppressed him.

'And where should a stranger go to find something com-  
moner?'

'Eastwards,' was the response.

'Where?' demanded Emily.

'City vays,' responded he.

'Is it far from here?' inquired Miss Delorme, who imagined 'city vays' to be a proper name and a place: 'is it far from here?'

'Miles, miss.'

'And how shall we get there?'

'There's busses and cabs,' he replied, following out *in propria personâ* his perpetually recurring admonition of 'moving on;' for move on he did, leaving the unlucky strangers to find out what he meant as best they could.

Dora looked helplessly around; there was not a soul to ask, the faces were all strange; the houses were all in the same style as those she had just left; the policeman's information was

assuredly of the vaguest; lodgings somehow must be got—but how?

A lady dressed in mourning turned the corner of the street at an acute angle; she was a most energetic individual altogether; short, decided, rapid—she was progressing at the rate of eight knots an hour, when Dora accosted her with—

‘Would you be so good as to tell me how to get to some part of London, not quite so genteel as this?’

‘Genteel and dingy, eh?’ interrogated the other; ‘it is rather a strange question, but if you will take a city omnibus, you will soon be far enough from this locality.’

‘Yes,’ persisted Dora, ‘but I meant something quiet and cheap, and——’

‘Oh, you mean lodgings,’ interrupted the other, looking earnestly at the pale, pretty face. ‘Well, let me see: there are furnished apartments off the Strand—and Bedford Row—and over the Water—and at Islington; and—but, good heavens, child, have you nobody to take care of you?’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Dora, reddening.

‘I mean, you are not going to stay in lodgings here alone, or——’ and her eye turned towards Emily as if she did not think she would do precisely for a companion.

‘No,’ said Dora; ‘I am not alone here, but my father cannot assist me in my search.’

‘Oh! well, I am sorry I do not know of any vacant apartments that would suit—but you might try at Islington, or some of those places; and—look in the *Times*, if you meet with nothing to meet your view there; and you will get omnibuses at the end of the next street; and I hope you may find something desirable,’ with which wish she nodded kindly to the girl, and departed.

It were vain to follow Dora through the remainder of her weary search—to tell how one person’s lodgings were too dear, and another’s too dirty, and a third’s close to the sky, and a fourth’s unendurable: how one recounted the history of her family, how another bewailed the misconduct of her husband, whilst her neighbour wept over the death of hers; how she was entertained with histories of the disasters that had brought the landlady of ‘37’ to the humble necessity of taking lodgers; how the mistress of ‘49’ hinted concerning the generosity of

single gentlemen in general, and young brokers in especial, who were worth double what they actually paid, or who, in other words, submitted quietly to be robbed; one woman related the quarrels she had had with all former lodgers, particularly the last but two, who had given her false references, and ran off fifty pounds, if her report were true, in her debt.

I told him,' she concluded, 'only two days before he went: said I to him, "I want to have lodgers in whom I can have confidence; now, I have none in you—I don't feel as if you were to be trusted. I have not the least faith in you."

"You speak expressive at any rate," said he.

"I always do," said I; and yet, even after this exhibition of candour, Dora refused to avail herself of the landlady's tempting offer of furnished apartments, with sincerity, temper, and politeness, *ad libitum*, thus added gratis.

As she returned home tired and disheartened, a memory of the abrupt little stranger's advice recurred to her, and she bought a 'Times:' and from a perfect mass of 'lodgings,' selected one to which she decided on writing, and having done this, and seen to her father's comfort, she went wearily and sadly to bed. Her first day in London had not tended to make her enamoured with her change of residence.

Morning came, and Dora was scarcely dressed before it was announced to her that 'Mrs Griffiths wished to speak to her.'

'And who is Mrs Griffiths?' she naturally demanded; whereupon Emily informed her she suspected it was the 'B.G.' to whom she had despatched a note, on the preceding evening, concerning rooms those initials had to let.

'Well, show her in,' said Dora, with becoming resignation; and in, accordingly, she came.

Dressed in a lilac silk gown and handsome shawl, a feather depending from her bonnet, bracelets ornamenting her arms, artificial flowers lending beauty to her face, she was one of those people who say 'they have not been used to such things,' and feel aggrieved because fate has insisted that they must get used to them, and a great many more besides. She carried Dora's note in a warlike manner in her hand, as if she were going to put her on oath regarding its contents—'She had taken the liberty of calling to see Miss Delorme—she thought

a personal interview was always desirable; she concluded Miss D. would wish to see her; she always liked to call upon persons who were thinking of taking her lodgings.'

But, though Dora took no exception to this fancy, she waxed rather indignant when the young lady suggested it would be expedient for her to look at the rooms before engaging them.

'Oh, as for that, she could do as she pleased; she could assure her they were most desirable; she had never been in the habit of letting lodgings—unfortunate circumstances compelled her to do so now; the apartments were unexceptionable, so was the locality'—so, in fine, was she.

'And the terms?' inquired Dora.

'Most moderate!'—and as, upon her naming them, such really turned out to be the case, Emily was despatched to report on the house, and to see if it would 'do.'

'Well, Miss Dora,' said she, on her return from her visit of inspection, 'it is better than most we saw yesterday, and seems pretty clean, but—'

'Can we live there?' demanded Dora, as if that were the summit of her earthly desires.

'Why, yes, Miss.'

'Then you must take the rooms,' replied the girl, 'if it is a place we can even stay in for a time, till something better presents itself we must not let the opportunity pass.'

'But, Miss Dora,' represented her nurse, 'if you only saw the daughter!'

'I shall see her soon enough,' said the young lady.

'Ah! that's just what I am afraid you will,' returned Emily; 'she's been brought up above her own station, and not fitted for any other, and yet thinks herself better than any one. If it were not for her——'

'I am not afraid even of her,' said Dora, smiling, as she went to tell her father she believed they had met with something which was 'tolerably suitable at last.'

And thus quietly and resignedly the girl began to make their new abode seem something like home. What a contrast it was to their late little bijou of a cottage. What a change one year had wrought in the destiny of Dora Delorme—then she had been the ornament of their pretty happy home,



the loveliest flower amongst all the bright ones which bloomed in their garden; and now she was a careworn nurse, and a patient teacher.

For speedily she became one, although, at first, her father strenuously and earnestly opposed the idea, and refused his consent to the plan.

'I *must* do it,' she said half-firmly, half-entreatingly; and as by degrees it became painfully evident how insufficient his income was to meet all the endless expenses of advice, medicine, rent, living, and so forth, his opposition gradually diminished, and finally he permitted Dora to do as she pleased; and thus she was spared the painful alternative of either openly or secretly disobeying her parent; for she had resolved to make money. She was determined not to concede this point to him; she felt it was right that she should exert her abilities—that she should make money—that Mr Lesparde should be repaid.

True, he had earnestly entreated her to forget the matter; to consider that the amount was her father's, and oblige him by never thinking again about the affair; but she had first voluntarily made, and then voluntarily renewed, her promise, and she would not break it now.

How monotonous a life it was; after tending her father, and reading to him perhaps for half the night, to have to rise early in the morning from troubled slumber, unrefreshed and weary, to guide, whilst he slept, wilful fingers over the keys of a piano; to endeavour to impress the fact that A flat in some particular passage was incorrect, on an ear which seemed incapable of distinguishing one air from another; again showing the difference between straight lines and crooked, to eyes to which all lines appeared the same; combating with stubbornness, incapacity, sluggishness, and wilful stupidity; studying the character of each new pupil, to discover, if possible, some vulnerable point to see by what means she could be induced to learn; whether by affection, by the wish to gratify her parents and friends, by a love of art, by emulation, by the desire of knowledge, or by dislike of grieving the patient instructress, who each day became paler and thinner, but whose gentleness and kindness never varied.

Surely a teacher, who amidst contending tempers, mental



sorrow, private vexations, the pressure of poverty, bodily weakness, and secret anxiety, remains unvaryingly patient, must be possessed of far more than the average amount of human virtues, and is deserving of our highest respect, our warmest sympathy and admiration, and accordingly, moved by her quiet endurance, Dora's pupils, who had at first looked coldly and sullenly on the young girl so very little their senior in anything save grief, grew to love her; and when flowers and fruit were sent them by their country friends, they brought her share of the gifts; and during the dark cold winter days, when presents of game and farm produce loaded all the coaches and waggons entering London, the children's parents sent Miss Delorme such rarities as they deemed most likely to tempt her sick father's appetite.

Still, in spite of all friendship and kindness could do, it was a toilsome, anxious existence. People told her she overexerted herself, and it was true, but she knew best *why* she did so; and thus she worked and slaved from morning till night, and the stern realities of experience, which time teaches to all, stared Dora in the face and jostled her at every step.

But the visions of her childhood still dwelling in her bosom—the darker earth became the brighter heaven appeared, and if she did not now as formerly enjoy life, she felt thoroughly resigned to the will of God, and thankful—oh! unspeakably thankful—that He, in His great mercy, had suffered the cup of sinful sorrow to pass away from her.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

THE little lady whom Dora Delorme encountered rounding the corner of that dingy street near to one of the fashionable London squares, was none other than Miss Enstridge, who at the time chanced to be rushing off, in a state of mind

bordering upon desperation, to the Chambers of her nephew Frederick, who had become a barrister. ¶

The only practice he had yet obtained was that of eating his dinners, which, to do him justice, he accomplished to perfection; and his acquaintances declared it was the only portion of his profession in which he was ever likely to obtain proficiency—heaven having bestowed on him, as a compensation for the lack of brains, an immense capacity for swallowing; those who knew him best laughed at the notion of his ever becoming famous, some who had liked and respected his father, said kindly, ‘he would develope talent in time,’ and poor Miss Enstridge, whose very heart was bound up in him, affirmed ‘she did not expect he would ever make a brilliant orator, but he might perhaps prove a very clever opinion.’ I never heard of a perfectly senseless barrister yet whose friends did not assert ‘he was a remarkably clever opinion’—whenever, in short, the gift of speaking in public is denied to a man, the world seems to take it for granted that he must be endowed with a double capacity for thinking in private; and Miss Enstridge, spite of all her sense, willingly deluded herself into the belief that Fred would some day or other rise to eminence, and make a figure in the world—that is, a quiet figure, uttering wisdom in a dusty, musty room.

Perhaps the poor lady thought brains would come to him with his whiskers, which latter appendages he longed to possess much more than the former, which would, indeed, have proved mere encumbrances to the perfectly contented young man. Miss Enstridge, in short, ‘lived in hopes of Fred,’ and, in truth, hope alone could have embellished him with any grace, save that of the most intense and immoveable good temper.

He sat with his mouth wide open in spite of the frequent remonstrances of his aunt, who said it looked like an immense fly-trap: he spoke little, and when he did it was very fast and very foolishly; he was desperately shy, he could not open his lips in the presence of ladies, and on all occasions seemed to find his hands so much in his way, that had it not been for fear of his aunt’s displeasure, he would have sat on them to keep them out of mischief.

There are very few aunts in this world who look as leniently

on the defects, faults, and failings of either nephews or nieces as Frances Enstridge did on the deficiencies of her late brother's only son.

'And for mercy's sake, child!' she exclaimed, suddenly bursting into his room, and disturbing the young gentleman's rapt contemplation of his face in general, and a dark shade round his mouth in particular; 'and for mercy's sake, child, what is this I hear?'

'I don't know, ma'am,' responded Fred, blushing crimson, and guiltily abandoning the mirror in which he had been admiring himself.

'Don't you? Well, you should, then, that's all,' returned his aunt; 'I have it upon good authority, that your absurd, ridiculous mother is going to be married again—'

'So they say,' acquiesced Fred, when his aunt paused, expecting some reply.

'So they say!' she repeated; 'so who says?'

'She,' briefly answered Frederick.

'She!—whom do you mean by she, sir?' demanded Miss Enstridge tartly, as though she had him on the table, and were wringing evidence out of him.

'My mother, ma'am,' he rejoined.

'Then you have known about it for some time, I dare say, and never told me, and—'

'I was to break the matter to you, but—'

'But what? Why can't you speak out at once like a man?' This was Miss Enstridge's favourite exordium to her nephew, perhaps because it was the very thing he least resembled.

'But I did not,' confessed Frederick humbly.

'And why, pray, did you not do as you were told?'

'Because I thought you would not be pleased.'

'Frederick Enstridge,' commenced his aunt, impressively, 'I have told you fifty times before that I had rather hear the worst of a bad business at once; I hate and detest being kept in the dark, and not knowing things at the proper time. Now, sir, will you remember this?'

'Yes,' acquiesced Frederick.

'And for pity's sake, child, keep your mouth shut and tell me who it is.'

‘To a man,’ he explained, never attempting the impossible feat his aunt had indicated.

‘Of course I know that; don’t be a fool, Fred—or rather, don’t pretend to be what you are not; I want to know what man?’

‘It’s a clergyman, I understand,’ he said with some hesitation.

‘A clergyman!’ repeated Miss Enstridge: ‘Lord bless me!’ and in effect so astonished was she at the intelligence, that had she been a Roman Catholic she would have crossed herself on the strength of it, but being a Protestant, she contented herself with the pious ejaculation recorded.

‘Is he a rector?’ she inquired, after a pause.

‘No,’ said Frederick, doubtfully.

‘Perhaps a vicar?’ she suggested.

‘I believe not,’ he returned.

‘Then what in the world is he?’ she demanded; ‘for he is in the world, and very possibly of it too, though he is a clergyman. What is he?’

‘A curate,’ almost whispered Frederick.

‘Well, Lucy Enstridge!’ exclaimed her sister-in-law, rising and addressing a speech to vacancy. ‘Well, Lucy Enstridge, I always said you were an idiot, and now I am sure of it. A curate!—a man without a sixpence, I suppose, beyond what he receives from his rector. What can have put such an idea into your mother’s mind?’ she inquired, turning to her nephew.

‘Why, ma’am—’ he commenced.

‘Don’t say “ma’am” so perpetually, Fred,’ she interposed; ‘I can’t bear to hear it: call me aunt, or aunt Fanny, or anything, only not “ma’am,” as if you were a lodging-house keeper.’

‘Well, aunt Fanny,’ he said deprecatingly; ‘you see she says the girls are now getting up, and they want a protector; and she—my mother—requires somebody to look after her affairs.’

‘If she had somebody to put her into a lunatic asylum, it would be the best thing ever happened to her,’ ejaculated Miss Enstridge. ‘Look after her affairs, indeed! Much looking after they require. And so she wants some one to take care of the girls! Well, the folly of this world, and of the women

who are in it, excels belief. If there must be a marriage in the family, why did she not tell him to propose for your eldest sister; your mother wants her to be "settled," as she calls it, and—'

'Yes; but she thought it would be better for the rest of us if she were married.'

'Better for the rest of you!' contemptuously retorted Miss Enstridge: 'what does she mean? Why do you want to be better than you are? is she mad?'

'No, aunt,' quietly responded Fred in answer to this abrupt appeal: 'she says she believes the girls; that is, I—'

'What?' interrogated Miss Enstridge, noticing his hesitation.

'That the girls ought to have some society,' he stammered.

'Oh! this is the meaning of it, then; she is marrying to get back to London, and to "bring out" her daughters, and to have you living at home with her, I suppose. Well, just let her try it; she will have to do without my assistance; for I won't have my peace disturbed, and my money taken too; and so you may tell her, Fred, when you are writing. That is my determination. I will not second such folly, or rather nonsense and absurdity; there—and, if you like, you may come over and take tea with me this evening.' Having concluded which speech, Miss Enstridge angrily went down the stairs, and walked off to Pimlico, her indignation not evaporating by the way.

'Mrs Lacie, ma'am, is in the drawing-room, wanting to see you,' said the servant who admitted her.

'That she shall,' emphatically muttered Miss Enstridge. 'So Lucy has sent her as ambassadress: well, she has no qualifications for the office that I know of, save weight.' And having arrived in this complimentary state of mind at the drawing-room door, she opened it to encounter Mrs Lacie.

'My dear Miss Enstridge, I have been longing to see you: it seems a perfect age since we met,' observed that lady blandly.

'I am sorry time hangs so heavily on your hands,' was the spinster's reply; 'but Henrietta Street is not so *very* far from here, that you need have made yourself unhappy about the unfrequency of our visits.'

‘Always the same,’ remarked Mrs Lacie, with a lackadaisical smile.

‘Yes; it is a failing I have in common with most of my acquaintances,’ responded Miss Enstridge: ‘time, I believe, alters few, improves none.’

‘Some people consider it a great compliment to be told they are always the same,’ suggested Mrs Lacie.

‘I detest compliments,’ was the short reply, ‘and never take one unless I see it is really sincere. So much for that, and now about Lucy, for I know you have come to speak of her.’

‘Oh! I was so astonished.’

‘Were you?’ tartly returned Miss Enstridge; ‘I should have thought you had lived long enough in this world not to be astonished at anything.’

‘But do you know,’ was the mild reply, ‘do you know, I really think she has made a most prudent, sensible choice.’

‘Was there any absolute necessity for her to choose at all?’ inquired the other.

‘Well, I consider there was.’

‘Humph! I might have been sure you did. I am not at all surprised to hear of Lucy marrying again.’

‘Indeed!’ ejaculated Mrs Lacie, as if she could scarcely believe the evidence of her senses. ‘Indeed!’

‘The only amazement I feel at the business is that any one would marry her,’ continued Miss Enstridge.

‘Now, really—’ began the visitor.

‘I know what you are going to say,’ interposed the other. ‘You were about to treat me to a list of her virtues, talents, and so forth. Suppose your view of her to be perfectly correct, I repeat it is wonderful to me to hear any sensible or even foolish man thinks of uniting himself to a woman without money, or influence, or any great advantages to counterbalance the fact of her being burdened with a large family, who have been brought up with the most extravagant ideas, and who are almost destitute of the means of support; it does seem to me wonderful, *unless*, and this is what I suspect to be the case, he has proposed for her under a delusion.’

‘Under a what?’ inquired Mrs Lacie, raising her eyebrows.

‘Under a delusion!’ repeated Miss Enstridge.



‘I fear I am very stupid,’ confessed Mrs Lacie, with a modest truthfulness, which was beautiful to behold.

An old saying about those whose blindness is incurable crossed Miss Enstridge’s mind, but she refrained from uttering it. ‘What I mean is this, Mrs Lacie,’ she said, ‘I fear that this curate has proposed for my sister-in-law whilst labouring under a misconception; possibly he imagines she was either left amply provided for, or that I have settled some fixed annual sum upon her. Lucy I know will never, till the end of time, or rather until after they are married, undeceive him, so I think affairs stand at present.’

‘It is a matter to be regretted,’ said Mrs Lacie, with a sarcastic smile, ‘that you and he cannot have a personal interview, so that you might ask if he be marrying my cousin from mercenary motives, and advise him against taking the step.’

‘You are mistaken,’ replied Miss Enstridge, ‘were he here this moment, sitting where you are now, I should not interfere with or counsel him in any way; I have always claimed liberty and exemption from control for myself, why should I refuse to extend these privileges to another? right or title I have none to meddle in the business, nor do I intend to meddle: he is a man, and ought to be able to look after his own interests for himself; if he is not, why he should have died long ago, that’s all. Were I in Lucy’s position I would ask him if he knew what my actual income was, or rather, I should tell him without asking; but as I am only Lucy’s sister-in-law, I am mute.’

‘I am rejoiced to find,’ said Mrs Lacie, ‘that you do not on the whole disapprove of her choice.’

‘Did I ever say a syllable to induce you to arrive at such a conclusion?’ demanded Miss Enstridge.

‘No; but from your comparative silence on the subject I inferred it,’ returned her visitor.

‘Because I have no right to interfere with or control Lucy in any way, that does not reconcile me to the extraordinary and absurd project she is about to put into execution.’

‘I know Lucy would be much grieved to hear that you consider the marriage a foolish affair.’

‘I have not a doubt of that,’ Miss Enstridge said drily: ‘may I inquire if you came from my sister-in-law to

inform me of the matter, and to learn my sentiments on the subject?’

‘I had a letter from her this morning,’ explained Mrs Lacie, ‘and she is most anxious to—’

‘To ascertain if I will continue to educate the girls, partially support her and them, and pay all Frederick’s expenses: nay, do not interrupt me,’ she added, seeing Mrs Lacie about to speak, ‘this is the true English of her letter, if not the precise wording of it. I intend to write her my intentions to-morrow, but if you are going to send your epistle sooner, you can set her mind thus far at ease by saying I mean to continue my allowance to her so long as she lives quietly and economically, and really devotes some portion of it to educating my brother’s children; but if she return to London, or attempt living in “style,” on the strength of my supposed liberality, that moment the remittances stop.’

‘But consider, my dear Miss Enstridge,’ gasped Mrs Lacie, ‘the utter isolation to which by this decision you doom your nieces, they could be educated for half the money twice as well in London; there are advantages to be met with in a metropolis, more especially in our metropolis, such as are to be found in no other place, and—and, in short, they ought to have some society, and be introduced to the world.’

‘I admit,’ responded Miss Enstridge, ‘that they *could* be educated here as you say at half price, but I emphatically deny that they would be so; there are advantages to be obtained here, but I much question if in their case the disadvantages would not greatly preponderate; and as for the society you speak of, and the introduction to the world, which you seem to think so very desirable, I am quite willing Lucy should be as extravagant and absurd as she likes, only I am determined not to pay for her ridiculous whims. Fashion and gentility, and “society,” and the “world,” wasted my brother’s patrimony, injured his health, induced over-exertion, caused mental anxiety, and finally killed him. No,’ added Miss Enstridge, in a very vehement and excited tone, ‘I have seen enough of “keeping up appearances” and squandering money wickedly in London, to satisfy me for ever, and, please Heaven, I will never be accessory to having such a course of folly and prodigality begun

again. That is my decided answer, and do not talk more about it, the subject irritates me.'

'But consider—' commenced Mrs Lacie once again.

'Good gracious! I have considered,' retorted Miss Enstridge; 'If Lucy Enstridge would take a small house, and conform to her means, and dispense with a footman, and not waste a fortune in parties and dress, and so forth, I should then say, return if you like; but this I know she could not do; therefore, I repeat, let her stay at the vicarage, or wherever her husband lives, and I will continue the sum I have hitherto regularly paid her; but if she bring this curate, and her daughters, and herself to London, she must do so on her own resources; I will not countenance directly or indirectly any such proceedings;' and Miss Enstridge looked so very much in earnest, and spoke so warmly, and had altogether the power so completely in her own hands, that Mrs Lacie, on the whole, deemed it prudent to retreat, thankful at least to find the annuity was not to be immediately discontinued, and she forthwith wrote a long letter to her 'dear, dear Lucy,' telling her what had occurred, and advising her to remain a very little time longer in her hermitage till she saw whether reflection might not work some beneficial alteration in Miss Enstridge's frame of mind. 'I have done much for you, my love,' she said, at the end; 'but regret all my efforts could accomplish no more. I think Mr Streatham had better abandon for a period his intention of seeking a curacy in town till we see what time may bring forth.' And accordingly Mrs Enstridge, taking advice, as every one else does, much against her will, and solely because she could not help it, staid away from her beloved London for the lapse of nearly a couple of years after her marriage, which event was duly solemnized in the parish church, standing amidst the swampy ground, surrounding the little Suffolk village where Lucy Enstridge had been born, reared, wooed, and twice wedded; and Mr Streatham often repented him of his choice, and confessed, with a sigh, 'he had been grossly deceived.'

But whether by his wife or his own imagination, he never added; therefore, until the day of his death, the world had two opinions on the subject, neither of which was wholly, and both of which were partially, correct.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

SPRING came, bringing with it dusty streets and crowds of dingy little sparrows to the metropolis, and Dora Delorme, beginning to think of how beautifully green the country must be looking, turned with a sad and weary heart from the broiling, scorching London thoroughfares, and the close atmosphere of their lodgings, to the memory of cool walks through shady woods, and of a room with windows open to the ground, where the wind found an entrance through Venetian blinds, and where she had been wont to spend her time in drawing, working, reading, or touching lightly the strings of her guitar in the days that seemed so very far away now, in the days before she became a teacher.

These were dangerous reveries in which to indulge, for a yearning for any good, whether real or imaginary, past or future, unfits us for the actual business of the present, and so the poor girl felt, and strove earnestly to forget that in wide England there was a spot of soft green turf, whereon she might lay her aching head, and, lulled by the lark's wild song or the murmur of a rivulet, become for a brief space oblivious of the cares and sorrows of existence; but with all her striving, recollections sometimes would come rushing so rapidly along the stream of memory, that they bore down at once all the barriers which, in the shape of 'good resolutions,' Dora had interposed to their progress.

Early in the morning, when she opened her window to admit what the inhabitants of a town call 'fresh air,' she would gaze forth over the tops of chimneys, and then her spirit seemed to go out from her body and revel in the midst of God's works, till she awoke from her long dream with a start; and at night also, when the quiet passionless stars shone down alike over hill and plain, over moor where no man trod, and the crowded city, upon the palace roof, and the den of poverty, Dora sat in her own or her father's chamber, earnestly, silently looking up at them; but in those still hours her thoughts wended their way up to heaven, not down to any spot of earth—beautiful though it might be.

Hers was truly a toilsome, wearying life; without greater sympathy, stay, or support, than that afforded by the consciousness that she was doing her duty, the girl worked on, rarely going out, much to the amazement and chagrin of Miss Griffiths, who had politely offered to be her companion, *chaperone*, and escort; and never visiting, equally to that young lady's astonishment, who wondered any civilized being 'could live without society.'

Dora, spite of their close proximity, spite of her own quiet gentle manners, and the effrontery and utter want of tact manifested by Miss Griffiths, had managed to ward off that young person's determined advances with great address, and had contrived to maintain her own position and dignity in a manner which moved Emily's to admiration, and to the most intense indignation the souls of the landlady and her daughter.

'Just as if you was not her equal, my dear,' remarked Mrs Griffiths, in confidence to the tightly-laced sylph, who, arrayed in blue tarlatan, and ornamented with a knot of red ribbon, sat in the parlour 'doing embroidery:' 'just as if you was not her equal any day.'

'And better, ma,' assented her daughter, 'for look at the money I shall have to my fortune, and this fine Miss Dora Delorme won't have a sixpence, I dare say; and I need do nothing but dress myself, and walk, and work flowers, unless I choose, while she works as hard at her teaching as Bidy down there below in the kitchen, and far harder than that Emily of hers, who never does a thing, and looks at me as if I were her natural enemy.'

'Well, well, my dear, never mind troubling your pretty head about them; they are sure pay, and give little trouble, and for the rest we can afford to look down on them,' was the mother's rejoinder.

'You are quite right there, ma,' replied Miss Griffiths; 'but still it is very provoking, for when you said she was just about my age, I thought we'd be such good friends, and that she would be such a respectable acquaintance—a major's daughter—for I did not know then she was to turn out a teacher. Well, I asked her one day if she had seen any of the parks, and when she said "No," I offered to take her with



me, but she answered quite short, "She was much obliged, but had no desire to go into them;" then another time, I asked should I take her to a cheap shop, where great bargains in dresses were going, and she said to that, "Thank you, Miss Griffiths, it is very thoughtful of you to propose it, but Emily buys all those sort of things for me," just as if she had been a duchess, and Emily her lady's-maid.'

'Never mind, my dear,' interposed the mother again, 'it's always those kind of people take the greatest airs on themselves; a real duchess has not a bit of pride about her. Never mind them, dear.'

'Well, neither I do, ma, but one day when I met her coming up the stairs, looking moped and pale, I asked her if she were tired of London, and she looked up in my face—she was standing a step or two below me—and said, "Very;" and I am sure I saw tears in her eyes though she tried to hide them, so then I, to comfort her, said, "Oh, you will like it better after a little; when you go out to a concert one evening, a musical party another, and perhaps down the water, or else to Richmond, in the summer-time; that's what ma and I do, and—" "You and Mrs Griffiths are differently situated from what I am," she said in such a hurry, just as I was going to say, "and if you would join us we'd be very glad—" "You and Mrs Griffiths are differently situated from what I am, and able to enjoy such things; I trust you may have many pleasant excursions when the fine weather comes;" and do you know, ma, I was so provoked, I just gave her one look, and marched down the stairs without answering her a word.'

'Quite right of you,' returned her mother, 'and if I were in your place, my dear, I would not demean myself by making any more advances to people who think themselves above you; though I know what my opinion on the subject is.'

'Well, and I know what mine is, too, but then it is so provoking. There's Minnie Armstrong down at No. 30, and their lodgers who have ten times the money these Delormes ever had (made it all by keeping an hotel at Birmingham); well, they have her in at all their parties, and they have ever so many, and take her with them to every place; and when she said to me the other day so conceitedly, "I don't think you and the Major's daughter associate much," I was in such a rage I could



have boxed her ears ; but I answered, "No ; her father is so ill she never scarcely stirs out." "Oh !" said Minnie, "is that the reason ? I thought perhaps she was proud." "Did you ?" said I ; "let me tell you, Miss Armstrong, Mrs Griffiths' daughter is as good any day as Major Delorme's, and I, who have nothing to do but amuse myself, am far better than she, who is just neither more nor less than a governess ; and I would thank you to remember this another time, and not speak impertinently to those who could sell you all out and buy you in again for that matter." Wasn't that right, ma ? those Armstrongs are so uppish because they pay ten pounds a year more rent than we do.'

'Minnie Armstrong is a very presuming, forward girl ; I always told you so,' replied Mrs Griffiths warmly ; 'but now, my dear, straighten your hair, for I see there has been a gentleman a looking at these windows for ever such a while, and now he's crossing the street to knock ; you may as well look as well as you can, you know,' and as the obedient daughter thought the same, she dashed to the mirror, and arranged her ringlets, and pulled out the ends of her bow, and fixed her mouth into a becoming smile, and then went back and caught up her embroidery and resumed operations upon it in the most innocent manner possible, just as the Irish servant, Biddy Meekins, put her head round the parlour door, and announced that 'there was wan wantin' to look at the lodgins.'

'Can't you say "apartments," Biddy ?' suggested Miss Griffiths, whilst her mamma, more intent on the making of money than the mending of manners, rushed out into the hall to greet the new arrival.

'What were you plazed to want, Miss ?' inquired Biddy.

'A genteel servant,' said Miss Griffiths, with a toss of her head.

'Troth, an' it's meself wishes I had a genteel mistress,' murmured the girl, as she tumbled down the kitchen stairs—for walk she rarely did, thanks to sundry rents in her dress and a pair of slippers that were never asked to stay up at the heels—'It's my notion,' she added to Emily, whom she found ironing in her especial sanctum, 'it's my notion, Mrs Griffiths might have laid out two-pence a week to worse advantage than in having that daughter of hers taught manners. I could not

put any into her now myself if they made a queen of me for it; but I wish somebody would take her down a peg or two, and put some of the conceit out of her—that I do.'

'She will get cured in time,' remarked Emily.

'Yes, may be; but not in time to do any good either to you or me,' returned the Hibernian quickly; 'but whenever the cure does come, I am sure her friends may be thankful, for she stands greatly in need of that same;' having concluded which speech, Miss Meekins tore what she termed a 'screed' off her dress, remarking it came 'handier' to pull it away than get a needle and thread, and that she had nearly broken her neck over it twice already that morning. She had made, through the instrumentality of this rent, only one step of the way from the parlour to the kitchen door: suppose we take an equally short one back to be re-introduced to Mr Conroy Bradshaw.

For it was indeed he whom bad fortune, in the way of some law business, had sent up to London to add another drop of bitterness to Dora Delorme's cup. Always on the look-out for 'cheapness,' having strayed into the quiet street they inhabited, he had been attracted by the notice, 'Furnished Apartments,' exhibited in the parlour window of the house in which the drawing-room floor was appropriated to the use of the paralytic officer and his daughter.

It were wearisome to record how Mrs Griffiths demanded more than her actual terms for the lodgings; how Mr Bradshaw offered something considerably under their letting value; how she diminished a little, and he agreed to give a trifle more; how they wrangled about sixpences and shillings, and kitchen firing, and the use of linen, until finally, after quarrelling, and wrangling, and haggling, it was settled he should have the apartments for a fortnight, and take possession of them forthwith; which matter being satisfactorily arranged, he went out to purchase provisions for his dinner, whilst Miss Griffiths bundled up her work, and descended, blue tarlatan, red bow, embroidery, grandeur, dignity, and gentility, into the front kitchen, out of which, on account of her advent, Biddy was instantly turned, and ordered to take up her position in the back one; and Biddy wished the new lodger in Mexico, for she said 'she knew she should have no life at all so long as Miss Griffiths was under-

ground; first, because of her close proximity to the servant's territories; and second, because of the extreme ill-temper a descent from the parlour invariably and naturally induced in the mental mood of the genteel young lady.

It was a fixed principle in the mind of Mr Conroy Bradshaw that he could cater for himself much more economically than any other person, and he consequently preferred buying chops, or something of that kind, for a frugal meal when in lodgings to going to a *restaurant*, where, no matter how much he ate, and how little he paid, he always thought he was cheated.

Thus he argued the point: 'If the rascal do not make a profit off me he would not be such a fool as to keep open his establishment; ergo, a profit must be made, and if it be, why should I not have it;' which train of reasoning proving perfectly conclusive, he sallied out, as has previously been stated, to purchase a dinner for himself. His marketing did not occupy any considerable period, but nevertheless he returned home warm, tired, and out of temper; he first settled up his accounts, made them balance to a half-penny, counted his cash, saw it was all correct, then lay down on the sofa, resolving to reverse his usual mode of procedure, and have a nap before dinner; but failing in this attempt, he looked vacantly round the room, and wondered 'what the deuce he should do till the viands were ready.'

So he arose with a dissatisfied yawn, and peeped into the drawer of the cheffonier, and examined the little vases and other ornaments which usually adorn the mantel-piece of a lodging-house; opened the few books scattered about to see if there were any name written in them; raised the chintz covering of the chairs to discover what coloured damask might be concealed from view; drummed on the table; strove to whistle, but the attempt proved abortive; and finally, when a double knock announced a stranger, or at least an arrival, he opened the parlour door about an inch, and placing his eye to the aperture thus caused, waited to see what manner or description of person it might be, whose advent broke even for a moment the monotony of his present existence.

A lady, very pale, quiet-looking, young and handsome, entered and passed up the stairs, but she had not reached the top

of the first flight ere an eager exclamation of 'Miss Delorme' caused her to pause in her ascent, and turn towards the speaker.

'Miss Delorme,' cried Mr Bradshaw, with tremulous eagerness, 'I am so glad to see you,' and he rushed up to her and caught her hand, whilst the Irish servant arrested herself in a slide down-stairs, by laying hold of the bannisters, and gazed with open mouth at Miss Delorme's acquaintance; and that young lady herself stood deprived of the power of speech at sight of the sudden apparition which had presented itself.

'And how is your father?' demanded Mr Bradshaw.

'He is very ill, thank you,' replied Dora.

'I'll just go up and ask him how he feels,' returned Conroy.

'My—my father never receives any visitors,' stammered Dora; 'he is not well enough to bear the excitement.'

'Oh! he won't object to see an old friend,' said Mr Bradshaw.

'I assure you—' commenced Dora, growing desperate.

'My dear Miss Delorme, I could not think of being in the same house and not renewing my acquaintance with him,' interrupted he: 'school-fellow—old friends from the same town—neighbours—that sort of thing. Do you know, I'm delighted to see you.'

'Thank you,' gasped Dora; 'it is very kind of you, indeed, to propose a visit, but he is so ill that—'

'Nothing so injurious to an invalid as perpetual monotony,' he again interposed, 'nothing; nor anything so beneficial as a little quiet but cheerful society; don't be offended at my pertinacity; I am a man who means well, and consequently never takes a refusal: allow me,' he added, flinging open the drawing-room door for her to enter. With a look of utter despair, she did so; and addressing her stricken father, said:

'Papa, Mr Bradshaw has come to see you.'

'Yes,' pursued that gentleman, speaking now for himself, 'and I am glad to see you, though you are not looking all your friends could wish; see what unexpected changes a few months bring about; when last we parted, I did not think we should meet again in London, delighted though to see you on any terms, or in any place;' and Mr Bradshaw having crossed the room at two strides, grasped the hand of the invalid and shook it till it ached,

whilst he once more vociferated, 'confoundedly glad to see you, Delorme.'

'Are you?' shortly returned the Major; 'I should scarcely have thought, after our last interview, the sight of me could have been productive of pleasure to you.'

'Oh! hang our last interview,' generously rejoined Mr Bradshaw; 'I am a plain honest Englishman; never carry a grudge about with me against any man: always let bygones be bygones; forgive and forget, that's my motto, especially when times are altered for the worse with the person who may once have treated me badly: come, come, Delorme, don't let that matter hang heavy on your mind: let us be friends—why shouldn't we?'

'Sir,' said the Major, 'you speak as though you had been the injured party; now I consider I was grossly insulted by you, therefore I must repeat a wish I formerly expressed, viz., that you would leave my house.'

Mr Bradshaw had almost retorted, 'Yes, but it was a wish I did not comply with,' when the recollection of his forcible dismissal recurring to his mind with more vividness than pleasure, caused him to bite back the reply and substitute in its place—

'Well, we may entertain different ideas on the subject; but still, as I said before, let bygones be bygones; I freely forgive you, and if you think I was the person in fault, why I am willing to add, "beg pardon, Delorme, sorry I annoyed you," and there's an end of it; now let's talk of something else.'

'Mr Bradshaw,' replied the Major, 'I know by experience you will not take a hint.'

'Medicine, hints, and advice—three things I never took in my life, unless I saw any advantage in so doing,' acquiesced Conroy, with a grin intended to be facetious.

'Therefore,' resumed Major Delorme, 'I never attempted implying my wishes to you in that way; but more explicitly than in telling you point blank I desire no interview with you, I find it utterly impossible to speak.'

'Well, my dear fellow, I don't want you to speak more explicitly; I understand perfectly what you mean; you want me to go out by that door, and stay out, but I won't take the hint. You have done quite enough to vindicate your own dignity and



so forth, and I really think you ought, ere now, to have got over my refusal to advance five hundred pounds on no security, particularly as I subsequently offered to *give* you the amount. Bless me, how high you were about it to be sure; and what a fool Lesparde was to put his name on a bill for you. I told him this very plainly, and he answered so sharply that he "wished I would attend to my own business, and not meddle with his," that I knew he was cut up about the matter. Desperately close, haughty, stingy chap;—fancy it went hard with him to have to pay down such a sum at once; understand, he had to hand it out every shilling. Pray, Delorme, was such actually the case?'

'Mr Bradshaw,' cried Dora, starting up, her own face flushed to the deepest crimson, 'Mr Bradshaw, do you not see how ill this—this—altercation and exciting conversation have made my father? His nerves are completely shattered; he has not strength to bear the excitement of visitors. Pray comply with his request, and—and leave us for a little while.'

Mr Bradshaw looked in some amazement, from Dora to her parent; the latter looked paler, indeed, but nothing remarkable. He thought there was something singular in her manner, and resolved to work out the problem at his leisure; meanwhile, as his ear caught the clatter of knives and forks, and other sounds, betokening the arrival of dinner, he deemed it prudent to make a virtue of departing, therefore, turning to Dora, he said—

'Would it oblige you if I were to go?'

'Greatly,' she replied; certainly with more candour than politeness.

'Well, then, I will,' he said; 'anything in reason to please a lady; anything on earth to please you.'

'Good-bye, Delorme,' he added, shaking the Major's hand in token of farewell; and having extended a similar mark of attentive civility to Dora, he departed to form plans for the future, in which that young lady, transmuted into Dora Bradshaw, played a conspicuous part.

Vain would it be to attempt to describe the Major's indignation at this intrusion—vehement exclamations of anger, mingled with curses, loud, deep, and long, broke in rapid succession from his trembling lips; feeling his utter incapacity to protect his daughter and himself from annoyance, he vented his rage in language which Dora trembled to hear.



Flinging her arms about his neck, she earnestly besought him to calm himself for her sake, for his own Dora's, adding, under the impulse and confidence of the moment, such words of love and tenderness, that growing suddenly conscious how much more lonely and helpless his child would be without him, how very desolate his death would leave her, the amiable, though selfish and weak-principled man, caught her to his heart, and the jealousy and doubt which had long gathered about his soul vanished, and for an instant it almost seemed to him as though she were the little relying Dora of former days, and he once again her grand protector and idol.

If Mr Conroy Bradshaw had never in his life been guilty of consciously performing a single good action, he did one unintentionally in the present instance, for he restored the affections of a wayward and estranged heart to their proper channel.

Perhaps from that hour Major Delorme loved his daughter better than had ever previously been the case, though it was utterly impossible for him in any after time, or under any variation of circumstances, to love her more after his own fashion than he had done in the years when they two—the father and the child—tenanted the pretty cottage amongst the flowers that had ceased to be home for ever.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

MR CONROY BRADSHAW discussed his thoughts and his dinner together—the former increasing his appetite, the latter stimulating his reflections; and accordingly, before he had finished his meal, he had arrived at the conclusion that he would in a very few days propose for Miss Delorme, and that she would accept him. For Mr Bradshaw, thinking, like many another, matrimony was the port towards which every girl must be steering, naturally concluded that now,

when nothing save utter poverty stared Dora in the face, when no better born or wealthier suitor was in the least likely to 'turn up,' she would thankfully say 'yes' to him; but still he entertained doubts concerning her father, who evidently had some remnants of his Orpen pride lingering about him even in London lodgings; yes, he had doubts of him, but he would wait quietly and see. The first great points for him positively to ascertain were how they lived, whom they saw, if they had many visitors, letters, and so forth; all of which particulars he speedily obtained from Miss Griffiths, who added to the narrative sundry disparaging remarks concerning Dora Delorme—her haughtiness, her airs, her stinginess, and her exclusiveness.

'Oh!' thought Conroy, 'then she is haughty still, in spite of their come down, and won't associate with her landlady's daughter, and teaches because she must, and not because she thinks she was born for no better station; but why must she teach? why don't they live on his half-pay, take a country house, and make both ends meet quietly somehow? and why is she stingy? can the girl be saving a dot for herself? I don't understand it.'

'She has only bought one new dress since I saw her,' pursued Miss Griffiths, looking over the top of Mr Bradshaw's head at herself in the mirror.

'You don't approve of such economy, I dare say, my dear,' said her listener, in a tone implying, however, that he did.

'Well, sir,' returned she quickly, taking the hint, 'I never should wish to be a dowdy; I like to dress with simplicity and taste; ma says she's sure, after all, though I always look so well, I don't spend more money in the year than the Major's daughter: she buys seldom indeed, but then *very* expensive, and such dingy colours; but I suppose,' she added, with a toss of her head, 'beauties may wear anything.'

'Oh! then Miss Delorme thinks herself a beauty, eh?'

'Perhaps so; people say she is handsome, but she is not what I admire,' candidly replied Miss Griffiths.

'And is it of her face she is so proud, or what?' he demanded.

'Oh! of everything. I suppose she expects some day to

be a grand lady, and is trying on airs to see how they will become her.'

'Humph!' ejaculated Mr Bradshaw.

'But she will find herself mistaken,' vehemently exclaimed Miss Griffiths, 'for rich gentlemen are not so fond of marrying governesses and young ladies without fortunes; however, pride is a failing Miss Delorme and I have in common, as ma says, and therefore I should not speak against her for it.'

'Then you——' interrogated Conroy, rather amused.

'Have some ideas above my station, and too exalted for my years,' she added; 'at least, so every one tells me. I might have been married often and often if I had not vowed never to wed one who was not my superior in *every* way. I may be wrong; people say I am, but I can't help it; for though not insolent to any one like Miss Delorme, I am proud, very proud,' and she tossed her head and darted a look at the lodger, which Mr Bradshaw's vanity interpreted, and rightly, to mean—'Still I should not refuse *you* if you proposed;' but he had not the least intention of doing anything of the sort, even although Mrs Griffiths subsequently informed him 'her Jemimer would be an uncommon fortune:' no, he had set out to marry Miss Delorme, and marry her in spite of fate he vowed he would; the worthy man never thought of adding 'if he could.'

Poor Dora, she often wondered during the course of that weary fortnight how much longer she could endure the annoyance; if another day would prove too much for her patience; if she could possibly bear it till the end of the week. The dread of exciting her father prevented her complaining to him of Mr Bradshaw's intrusions, for that gentleman, fully comprehending Major Delorme's temper, and equally understanding his daughter's watchful care of him, generally timed his visits so as to avoid encountering her parent, who never rose until mid-day, and very frequently not until late in the afternoon; therefore, though the Major knew enough to cause him to gnash his teeth in impotent rage, he was by no means aware either of the frequency or length of Mr Bradshaw's visits.

'Never mind, dear papa,' she said one morning, when he proposed that they should leave their lodgings, Dora's pupils,

and everything to get rid of their insufferable fellow-townsmen ; ' never mind, it is only for a few days longer ; he cannot stay here for any considerable period, his home is in the country, and when he returns there, we shall once again be free ; it would be a folly to incur the expense of removal for so trivial a cause.'

So trivial a cause, she called it, which was chafing her spirits, injuring her health, giving her ceaseless annoyance : daily Mr Bradshaw entered her sitting-room ; he was to be seen lolling on the sofa, gazing intently at Dora whilst she gave her drawing and music lessons, and the consciousness that his eyes were intently fixed upon her made her nervous, and what none of her pupils had ever previously seen her— impatient.

Time wore on : the fourteen days at last were out : surely he would go now. No, he had taken the rooms for another week ; this she felt might last for ever : could she bear it ? she would try a little longer ; but she feared her endurance would not, could not, hold out against the infliction for any considerable period. She would try.

' If you please, Miss, Mr Bradshaw's compliments with this,' said the maid-of-all-work, entering just as Dora had arrived at the above decision.

' What is it ?' demanded Dora, looking suspiciously at the parcel.

' Meself doesn't know, unless it's a love-token,' said the girl with a grin, which almost drove her auditor crazy.

' I shall have to trouble you, Biddy, to take it back with Miss Delorme's compliments to Mr Bradshaw.'

' Oh, it's far from a trouble, I think it, to do that same,' responded the girl joyfully, adding, as she descended the stairs, ' I know one in the house wouldn't refuse it anyhow ;' but when the servant delivered Dora's brief message to Mr Bradshaw, with an addition thereto, which she had, as she subsequently told Emily, ' made a purpose for him,' that gentleman waxed exceedingly wroth, and determined, as he mentally phrased it, ' to put a nail in the matter at once.' Accordingly leaving his parlour, and ascending to the drawing-room, he demanded an interview immediately with its sole occupant, Dora Delorme, as it happened.

‘Miss Delorme,’ he began, ‘it is high time we should understand each other.’

Dora did not answer.

‘You cannot have been blind,’ he continued, ‘to my partiality for you.’

‘Nor can you have failed to perceive,’ said Dora shortly, ‘that I never returned nor encouraged it.’

‘I am not so clear about that,’ he impatiently returned.

‘Will you be kind enough to consider I have expressed my sentiments?’ she said: ‘it will save us both an unpleasant discussion, and I am desirous of going to my father.’

‘You take it quickly for granted that I was about to propose,’ he sneered.

‘I knew it,’ returned Dora quietly

‘I thought ladies always waited for a decided proposal before declining it?’ he added.

‘In most cases perhaps,’ she asserted; ‘but I have not said no. I merely stated I had no partiality for you, and begged we might have no further conversation on the subject.’

‘But I have a great deal more to say,’ he began.

‘I cannot hear it,’ she returned, moving towards the door; but Mr Bradshaw suspecting her design, frustrated it by stepping between her and all hope of escape.

‘You cannot now help hearing,’ he said, ‘if I choose to talk, and I do.’

Dora’s cheek became somewhat redder, but she remained silent.

‘Miss Delorme,’ he resumed, ‘I am not a man of any sentiment or romance, or folly, or—or humbug, therefore I perhaps come too plainly to the point to suit the ideas of a young lady; but what I mean to say is this—that I love you, that I want you to marry me, that I intend you shall do so.’

‘Sir!’ exclaimed Dora angrily.

‘Yes; you cannot be so mad as not to see all the advantages of such a union. I am ten times as rich as your father ever was. You shall have a handsome house, plenty of servants—I don’t approve much of marriage-settlements; but if your father wish it, why I will make one, and—’

‘Indeed, Mr Bradshaw, it cannot be,’ said Dora.

‘And why not, I should like to know?’ he demanded.

‘I suppose,’ began Dora, ‘that you are very rich, and that I ought to be very grateful; but—’

‘But what?’ he inquired.

‘I don’t think people marry altogether for handsome houses, and money, and settlements,’ replied she.

‘Then what the deuce do they marry for?’ he asked.

Which question Dora finding herself incompetent to answer, he continued,

‘Now, Miss Delorme, just listen to me for a few minutes. Your mother made what is called a love match, and a very pretty business to my mind she made of it. Suppose you do something far better, which is—to marry me. You shall have everything you could wish for—a carriage if you like; you are fond of flowers and the country, and all that sort of thing—well, Moorfield is a beautiful place, and I will do it up exactly as you choose. It would surely be a great comfort to your father to know you were provided for, and that at his death you would not be left penniless. I—’

‘Mr Bradshaw,’ exclaimed Dora, her breath coming fast and short, with excessive anger and excessive emotion, ‘will you take my answer—‘No’—at once, and let me pass?’

‘You don’t mean to say you actually refuse.’

‘I do; it is my final, unchangeable answer.’

‘You will think differently after you have considered the advantages I have enumerated,’ he remonstrated.

‘I wouldn’t marry you,’ said Dora, her eyes flashing whilst she vainly essayed to reach the door; ‘I wouldn’t marry you if you were ten times as rich, if the advantages you speak of were fifty times as numerous.’

‘Indeed!’ said Conroy incredulously, for he considered this a little ebullition of pride and temper which would soon be over: ‘indeed! and if I may inquire, why would you not?’

‘Because, if you must know—I *hate* you,’ returned Dora with an energy and emphasis which perfectly amazed her suitor, and made him feel uncomfortably convinced of her sincerity.

‘Then,’ remarked Mr Bradshaw after a moment’s reflection, ‘if you hate me, you love some one else.’

‘I do not,’ was her quick reply.

‘Humbug,’ politely ejaculated Conroy.

‘I have given you my answer, and my reason for it,’ con-



tinued Dora; 'please either to leave the room, or let me do so.'

'Wait a moment,' exclaimed Mr Bradshaw, the problem he had so long been working becoming as he fancied solved at last: 'do you mean absolutely to say you love no one?'

'Sir,' said Dora, 'I have replied to all the questions I think you have any right to ask; let me pass.'

'I will—I will indeed if you will just answer another.'

'What is it?' demanded Dora.

'If you hate me, do you love no one else, not even,' and the sharp penetrating eyes turned full upon her as he put the interrogatory, 'not even Edmund Lesparde?'

As if he had struck a deadly blow, the girl shrunk back at his words; she could not speak, she felt as though she were choking; a hundred contending emotions came swelling up in her heart, and prevented her uttering a syllable; the colour came and went in her cheek; she tried to reply but could not.

'I want no answer,' said Mr Bradshaw fiercely, 'none, for I see it written in your face as clearly as if the words were printed there; so this is the reason, is it—this is the reason; and now,' he added, 'let me tell you Edmund Lesparde has no more thought, or care, or love for you than—than I have for him.'

'You have misunderstood me, indeed you have,' pleaded Dora, but he interrupted her, for it was now his moment of triumph over her, though of intense mortification to himself.

'No, I have not misunderstood anything. I comprehend now what was a mystery to me before, but if it be for love of him you are refusing me, I can tell you he is engaged to be married—I am not deceiving you; it is perfectly true—nay, very possibly he is already married. What do you say now?'

'This,' said Dora proudly, drawing up her figure to its full height, and looking steadfastly in the face of her tormentor, 'this, that you have misunderstood me; that Mr Lesparde is no more to me, and never could be more, than a valued friend—one whom, for the sake of his kind good heart, I like and esteem. If there were not such a person on earth, I would still answer you as I have done. God grant that, whether married or single, Edmund Lesparde may be as happy as I wish him!'

‘Considering he is *merely* a friend, you are wonderfully enthusiastic concerning him!’ sneered Mr Bradshaw.

‘He has been kind to me and mine,’ replied she, tears almost starting into her eyes as she spoke. ‘I trust my heart will never become so cold as to be incapable of feeling gratitude.’

‘I shall see Mr Lesparde on my return to Orpen,’ remarked Mr Bradshaw; ‘no doubt it will be satisfactory to him to hear he is so kindly remembered by so fair a lady.’

Once again the deep crimson flush swept over Dora’s face, but she said, after a pause, ‘Will you let me pass as you promised you would? I have now answered all your questions.’

‘With a vengeance,’ quoth Conroy; ‘but still I do not yet despair,’ and he opened the door for her and watched her ascend the stairs, and noticed that she did not enter her father’s chamber, but went sorrowfully to her own, and then he too quitted the drawing-room and descended to the parlour, murmuring as he went, ‘So this is the true state of the case, is it?’

And Dora? Oh! what scalding tears of wounded pride, and anger, and sorrow, and shame, she wept after that interview; how earnestly she strove to penetrate the very innermost recesses of her heart, to discover if that dreadful thing this man had said were true; if she had really cared for one who never cared for her; if gratitude had been but another and more specious name for love; she could not tell, she did not think Mr Bradshaw was correct, she knew she would not marry Mr Lesparde, she hoped earnestly they might never meet again; she did wish him every good in life, would do anything for him, but this was merely gratitude surely—surely nothing more, and she had answered truly and sincerely; yet still the idea of such a man as Mr Bradshaw touching such a chord, causing her to put such questions to her soul, it was dreadful—in the very depths of her heart she hated him.

And her proud spirit swelled at the idea of any one thus persecuting her, merely because she was poor. Those who have been accustomed to affluence require a long and severe training before they come thoroughly to understand the full meaning of the word ‘poverty;’ not the mere bodily privations incident on shortness of money, but the mental annoyances

consequent upon it. Perhaps until Mr Bradshaw so generously and delicately offered her his hand and fortune, she had never felt, never fully comprehended, how poor she really was; but the conviction then suddenly forced itself upon her, that she no longer occupied the position she had once done; that she was, in fact, no more than one earning her daily bread. It was a very mortifying discovery; one which made her reject his suit with greater scorn than she would have done in the hey-day of prosperity, for she saw that even whilst he earnestly desired her to marry him, and was willing to concede much if she would only do so, he still considered he was conferring a compliment and an honour on her by thus offering her an asylum: she felt that though she was young, handsome, well-born, lady-like, accomplished, he deemed his money more than counterbalanced all these advantages; that he had fancied she would gladly wed him, because—solely because she was so poor and he so rich.

Dora thought of all these things until she became almost insane; then starting she rushed to her father's room, and said—

‘Dear papa, I can bear it no longer; let us leave this place; let us leave it at once.’

## CHAPTER XXV.

‘BUT, I say,’ expostulated Biddy Meekins, on the morning following the explanation with Mr Bradshaw; ‘but, I say, what for am I to call a cab at all at this hour of the day?’

‘Can’t you be quiet,’ replied Emily, ‘and do as I tell you, without asking questions?’

‘Well, whisper it, then,’ said Biddy, ‘whisper it secretly into my ear, *raison* and all, and I’ll go;’ wherefore Emily did whisper the news of Major Delorme’s intended departure to the girl, who immediately jumping with Hibernian rapidity to conclusions, ejaculated,

‘ Bless us and save us ! and is it all along of that old stingy, dried up, dingy-faced turk ? I wish they had him in the bogs to pelt ducks and drakes at, it’s the only thing he’d be of use for.’

‘ To do what ? ’ inquired Emily.

‘ To clod stone sat,’ explained Miss Meekins. ‘ Here have I been for three weeks at laste, tramping up and down stairs, wearing out my mistress’ carpets, and knocking the soles out of my shoes ; just wasting my time carrying one thing up and another thing up to Miss Delorme, with Mr Bradshaw’s compliments—his, indeed !—and yet, though he was courting, he never as much as said to me—Here’s a sixpence for you, Biddy, or have ye a mouth on ye—ye purty colleen—not that I want anything off him, but it just shows his mean spirit.’

‘ But ! ’ demanded Emily, completely mystified, ‘ why should he ask if you have a mouth ? don’t he see you have ? ’

‘ But you English knows little,’ retorted Biddy, contemptuously, ‘ makin’ me thranslate even your own tongue for ye ; don’t you see, when a boy wants to thrate a girl in Ireland, he asks ‘ Has she a mouth on her ? ’ and that mains, could she take half a glass of whisky—it’s more feasible lookin’ ye understan’, than just askin’ her plump and plain ; and then she says, yes ! or sometimes no ! but bless me, it’s just like talkin’ to haythens here, for ye’ve no sense, nor fun, nor action in ye, no more nor if ye were dead ; and so that poor pale pretty darlin’ young lady is goin’ away ; I wish she’d take me with her ; I’d rather go with her for nothing, than stay here at twenty pounds a year ; but, och shure, I needn’t think of that ; and you need not have kep’ it such a secret, for Miss Griffiths would die sooner than let him know, and I say—oh ! sweet shamrock, to think of that ; of the mistress gettin’ a week’s rent, or maybe a fortnight, out of them for nothing. I wish that old fellow was among the flukes, that I do ; ’ having concluded which Christian speech, Miss Meekins went out to seek a cab, but as she had an extensive acquaintance amongst the drivers, and found occasion to interchange some remark with each, and as, moreover, she had so many ‘ favourites ’ on the stand that she experienced some difficulty in selecting which to take, the time she consumed in her search was quite sufficient to move Dora to despair and her nurse to indignation.

‘What on earth kept you?’ demanded the latter, when Biddy re-appeared.

‘Looking for a genteel car, that they might turn out decent shure,’ replied the importation from the Isle of Saints: ‘now move about quick, Bob,’ she continued, addressing the cabman, with an air of command, ‘put on thame boxes, and don’t look as if the pigs had run away with your wits when you were sleepin’.

‘But—but, Miss Delorme,’ she added, ‘what’s all this for? och! lave me just a token, it’s all I want off ye, nothing like this;’ and she wonderingly contemplated the Major’s parting gift: ‘and, miss, dear! but I’m sorry, even though I’m glad, to see the last of ye, and if ever ye want a girl, Miss Delorme, to do anything not very particular, will ye send for me? I—I’d work gladly for ye on my bended knees; and—and, och! hone-a-ne! but this is a sore, sore day for me and Ireland;’ by way of finish to which speech, Biddy flung her apron over her head, slid down the kitchen stairs, and remained at the bottom of the flight sobbing convulsively, and this performance she continued till Dora stepped out of the house, when the girl rushed after her, and seizing her hand kissed it over and over again.

‘Do be quiet, Biddy,’ said the young lady, tears starting to her eyes at this unexpected demonstration of affection, ‘and compose yourself.’

‘Oh! the like of you will never darken these doors again, nor lighten the house,’ murmured Biddy: ‘God send you health, and peace, and luck wherever ye go,’ and even while she spoke the vehicle drove off, that vehicle which was carrying Major Delorme and his daughter out of London in search of a new home.

As she re-entered the dwelling Biddy caught sight of a pink face, ornamented with curl papers, gazing after the departing conveyance.

‘Shut the door, Biddy, and attend to your work,’ exclaimed the owner thereof in a shrill though genteel accent.

‘And there’s one in the house glad at any rate that angel’s out of it,’ soliloquized Biddy, going down on her knees to brush the parlour grate, breathing forth a malediction against Miss Griffiths and a blessing on Miss Delorme: ‘an’ it’s not me, an’ it’s not old Bradshaw, nor the mistress *much*, but it’s



yourself, Biddy Meekin, ye dissolute forlorn exile in a foreign land, knows who it is to yur sorrow,' and the 'exile' polished away at the grate in desperation, and though she spoke no more she shed many tears; and, as she expressed it in the excitement and grief of her mind, 'thumped away at the thinking' till breakfast time arrived, at which meal Mr Bradshaw duly appeared, little dreaming that ere he had surveyed his features in the glass, she whom he loved had departed beyond his ken, far, far beyond his vision.

Vain would it be to attempt to describe his dismay when he learnt the fact that the bird had absolutely flown; he questioned Biddy, he threatened, and he actually tried to bribe her. Biddy knew nothing; she told a perfect string of untruths on the strength of the affair; she could not say exactly where the cab came from, the driver was a stranger to her, she had picked him up in the street 'beyant;,' he was not like anybody; she thought he wasn't young, but he might be; she had not heard where they were going; she had seen no number on the cab; she wouldn't know the man if she were to meet him on the step that minute; she believed the horse was black; she hadn't seen which way they drove, she had her work to attend to, she had no time to be looking out of the window; she had never asked Emily a question, she thought it 'maue and underbred to ask questions;,' she couldn't tell him a thing if he were to take out a summons for her that minute; and then Mr Bradshaw reproached her with being a 'potatoo-eating, senseless, useless, lazy, Irish fool,' whereupon Miss Meekins warmly returned, 'she would never feel ashamed of saying she came from a country from which all the "varmint" had been cleared off.'

And when Mr Bradshaw furiously demanded 'what she meant by her cursed impudence,' she retorted, 'Nothin'; only that since St Patrick cleared *us* of them, I hear there have been lots of snakes in England;,' and finally where the altercation might have ended it is impossible to say, had not Miss Griffiths arrived in time to throw oil on the waters, and enable Biddy to beat a triumphant retreat, all colours flying; and in the quiet twilight of that very evening she just stole round the corner to the next stand to ask Bob quietly 'where he had driven the quality to,' and to give him a hint how 'the wind lay,' and to tell him to have had 'no fare that morning if one



made free to ask him the question;’ and greatly comforted to know where Miss Delorme was gone, she returned to the house, which in consequence of a somewhat warm altercation with the owner, she received notice on the following morning to quit.

‘Well,’ she said, as she made up her bundle of clothes, placing her worldly effects in most admired disorder in the centre of a plaid shawl, the ends of which she tied à l’*Irlandaise*, cross-cornerwise together, ‘there’s as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and we’ll see if I can’t hook something better than Mrs G. and her daughter—worse is not to be found even in London;’ and having already received her wages, she departed forthwith without more ceremonious leave-taking than that contained in the simple sentence, ‘Well, mem, I’m away.’

Passing the cab-stand on the road, she just stopped to explain how matters stood to Bob, and to say good-bye, the result of which stoppage and explanation was that at the end of a month’s time, the banns having been duly read, and a ring purchased out of her savings, Miss Meekins found herself, so she wrote home, or rather so she desired to be written home, ‘transmogrified into Mrs Bridget Cole, and translated into a cellar,’ wherein, to speak truth, she abode just as contentedly as if it had been a paradise, and Robert Cole, her very indifferent husband, one of the angels thereof. And Dora Delorme, where was she gone? to a pretty village, distant twelve miles from the great Babylon; which, kind reader, you will not now, I fear, find marked in any map as Ilpingden.

As we advance in life, and the failing strength of the body weakens the powers of the mind, we become unreasonably influenced by trivial associations, and foolishly swayed by early memories, and it was an old recollection, a sentimental feeling, which induced Major Delorme to select the place above-mentioned for a residence.

Twenty or twenty-one years before, during the time when his regiment was quartered in London, immediately after his marriage, he and his wife had driven out there and spent a pleasant day, wandering about the shady lanes, pulling wild roses from the hedge-rows, little dreaming that the time would

ever come when they must be separated. It was, in fact, one of the few places on earth that brought no vain regrets, no sad or sinful memories back to his heart, and he turned with something like quiet satisfaction to the thought of the peaceful village with its old gray church tower rising from amidst the trees; the inn, so snug and clean, surrounded by a pretty flower-garden; the rectory, with its pointed gables and latticed windows; the row of small houses constituting the only street; the white cottages dotting the roads in all directions; whilst dark woods backed the scene, and, at every step some fine old English mansion was revealed to view.

No one knew him there: Orpen was far, far distant from the secluded spot; and in those days railroads, being rarities, did not, as at present, intersect every land, in all directions, rendering it almost impossible to choose any 'city of refuge,' in which to live—forgotten and unknown.

Rents were low in that place; and the houses, if neither very commodious nor numerous, were at least suitable to their limited means: wherefore, to Dora's unspeakable thankfulness, they were soon settled in a house of their own, amidst the green fields and waving woods of Ilpingden.

At that time, though education had made rapid strides, an accomplished woman was rather more rarely to be met with than is now the case; and those disposed to make money by their talents, generally preferred remaining in the large towns, which were not then so overstocked with commodities of all kinds, as at present—when a man might as soon think of inventing an apparatus to make the sun shine all the year round upon these misty isles of ours, as of starting any new trade.

Dora, therefore, speedily found that Ilpingden presented better chances of making money than London had done—for here she possessed a monopoly, whilst there she had been merely one amongst many: but, though all the inhabitants, after a brief period, came to the conclusion, that it was better and more economical to have their children educated on the spot, than to send their conveyances some miles with them daily, or to pay professors extra terms for extra distance; yet, there was much diversity of opinion with regard to the position the young teacher should occupy.

Some of the old untitled families, indeed, who traced back

to the Conquest, and had lived quietly in the village for centuries (that is, their ancestors had), were quite willing to greet the stranger kindly, and strive by slight attentions and kindly actions to render her lonely and arduous life more endurable; but there was another party, headed by Sir Peter Tomkins, who had made his money (so ill-natured people asserted) in the slave trade, that looked down on the new comers, declared they thought it sufficient to pay money for services rendered, declined all intercourse beyond the little entailed by quarterly settlements, entertained doubts as to whether the Major's title was not an entirely fictitious one, at best acquired in the militia; and the ladies of this clique gathered their dresses tightly around them lest their skirts might touch Dora's in passing, and said 'Good morning, Miss Delorme,' in so condescending a manner, that had her mind been properly constituted, she would have been quite overwhelmed by their extraordinary civility; but unfortunately her mind was not properly constituted; her thoughts being intently fixed on the grand object of paying her debt. If these rich supercilious people aided her project she cared very little for their airs of patronizing superiority.

How few incidents in such a life worth narrating; when it was monotonous to the soul of the actor, surely a recital of her daily experiences would be wearying also to the reader.

Days, months, years passed by—slowly it is true, but still they did pass somehow. Three years had elapsed since Dora's departure from Orpen, and yet with all her saving and pinching, self-denying economy, and ceaseless exertions, the claims on her purse were so heavy, that at the expiration of the above period she had but one hundred pounds towards her purpose. This she felt would never do; at an equally slow pace it would take fifteen years to accomplish that which in the folly and inexperience of her youth she had hoped could have been effected almost immediately; and what was worse, she foresaw she should for the future be able to economize even less than formerly; for each day her father's health became more precarious and infirm; and not even for the sake of repaying Mr Lesparde could she deprive him of a single comfort or luxury, let either cost what it might.

Some new plan must be struck out; to go on thus, hoping by trifles ever to make up the sum which seemed (as she daily

better comprehended the immense difficulty of making money) to grow larger every time she thought of it, was an absurdity not to be dreamed of; some new plan must be struck out, and that at once. What should it be?

One morning she awoke from a troubled dream with a start: that debt tormented her day and night, it lay like a load in her bosom; it accompanied her in her walks; it kept watch by her during her lonely vigils near the invalid; even in the house of God it haunted her, it came betwixt the patient, struggling girl and her thoughts of Heaven.

How was it ever to be paid? was there no way she could add more to their income? she would do anything—anything in the world to make money.

She would go and ask Mrs Imlach's advice; she could not wait until the afternoon; she must go that instant.

Mrs Imlach was the wife of the present incumbent, daughter of the last; wife of that very Mr Imlach who once had been engaged to Miss Enstridge; sister to the Mr De Lisle who before the marriage had accused the rector, whom he considered as an intruder, of too strong a leaning towards Rome.

Mrs Imlach was the eldest of seven children; all of whom she had survived save her brother, the clergyman.

The second, a fair-haired girl, had grown to womanhood, and then—drooped, faded, died; she reposed in the churchyard of Ilpingden, and beside her lay a little brother the youngest of the group. One had married an officer, and left her native land with him, never to return. The sea knew the resting-place of two fine lads, and the son of a neighbouring nobleman still bore crape on his hat for the youngest, whose remains lay with those of his ancestors, in the gloomy family vault.

The child of the one who had died under Indian suns made the old parsonage walls ring with joyful laughter; she was destitute, utterly so, of companions of her own age; for no son or daughter ever came to bring pleasure or sorrow, happiness or misery, to the hearts of the present rector and his wife—they were childless—and often as the quiet, gentle lady thought of what a cheerful group had once gathered around the social hearth, she could have wept to remember the old days when her father was rector, ere death, and absence, and time, had

stilled young hearts before age had touched them, and carried all away from this old house, save herself.

It was the orphan, whom Mrs Imlach's care cherished, who greeting Dora lovingly on the morning in question, caught her hand eagerly, and with head nestling amidst the folds of the young girl's dress, led her into the breakfast-room, where her good aunt was sitting behind an urn, pouring out scalding tea, whilst her husband perused the *Times*.

Dora's business was briefly explained; she wanted to know if Mrs Imlach could suggest any plan by which she might add a little more to their income. She did not much care *how*, she was not at all particular; she would, in fine, do anything; for she must make more by some means.

The lady listened patiently, but shook her head when Dora had concluded, and referred to her husband—

'Henry, my dear, how can Miss Delorme make more money?'

'I hope you are not getting fond of it,' he said, with a smile.

'Not for its own sake,' Dora returned, colouring; 'but I really find, that all I am at present able to make, is quite insufficient for what I require: and, consequently, I have resolved to try and earn more.'

Some vague thoughts of want of economy, and of the kindness and fitness of offering Dora a few useful hints, concerning more prudent domestic management, floated through Mrs Imlach's mind—for one lady, no matter how humble or charitable she may be, is wondrously apt to reflect, that were she in another's place, she could make that other's income do twice as much—the same amount last double as long; but these reflections only occupied her for a moment: for she had not merely no ground for believing Dora to be extravagant, but had always imagined her to be prudent, and careful, and self-denying, beyond her years; still, her embarrassments remained a puzzling question, a complete enigma—What did she—what could she do with all the money she received?

Mrs Imlach knew Major Delorme had some private resources; that, although their domestic expenses were heavy, Dora cleared a handsome sum per annum by her pupils; why therefore be, apparently, so needlessly anxious to make more?



The lady could not comprehend it; but Mr Imlach subsequently somewhat relieved her mind by remarking—

‘That is not our affair: there may be drags we know nothing of; at all events, we ought to help her if in our power, as she appears to be a most careful manager, an amiable girl, and an exemplary daughter.’

A stronger feeling, perhaps, than any of these, however, influenced the heart of the rector’s wife, for Dora had a power of drawing children’s affections towards her which seemed irresistible, and amongst those who clung most fondly to her was little Jenny Nicholls, Mrs Imlach’s favourite niece, the child of her best-loved and long-lamented sister.

Dora, too, was young and pretty, had evidently commenced life under far happier auspices than those with which she seemed destined to end it, and there lies in the bosoms of most people a something which causes them to gaze kindly on one early compelled to battle with the world, and bear an undue portion of its troubles.

‘What can she do, Henry, my dear?’ Mrs Imlach once again inquired, appealing to her husband.

‘What should you think of having a lady to reside with you?’ he demanded, looking over his spectacles at Dora, who quickly returned:

‘If she paid handsomely it would suit me better, perhaps, than anything else.’

‘Then secure the owner of those initials,’ he replied, handing the newspaper over to Dora, and pointing to an advertisement on which his eye had just fallen; ‘I know her well; she is rather peculiar certainly, but you need not mind that, for she is as truly good and worthy a woman as ever breathed, and will pay liberally, and be in addition easily satisfied. Go to London yourself and see her; it will prove more satisfactory, and better in every way than a score of letters. I can write a note that will be an introduction for you, though indeed with her such is scarcely necessary.’

And the worthy rector proceeded to drink his tea, which now was cold as ice, with a thoroughly contented air, evidently considering he had performed a good action in a manner perfectly satisfactory to himself, having put Dora *en route*, as it were, to amass a small fortune.



Joyfully Dora departed. How strange she should never before have thought of such a simple expedient! How provoking to have wasted so much time, when something—no matter how little, still a something—might have been added to her hoard. It was provoking, but still it was well to attempt it even now, and she would attempt it, and thankfully follow Mr Imlach's advice, and secure the lady—if she could.

Major Delorme had now become so helpless, mentally as well as physically, that he usually acquiesced in whatsoever his daughter proposed without a murmur of dissent; therefore having acquainted him with the plan she had thought of, having given Emily all manner of directions concerning what she was to do for the invalid's comfort during her absence, and provided also with the note Mr Imlach had promised, she took her seat on the following morning inside the coach which passed through Ilpingden to London, and went to face Miss Enstridge in —— Street.

During the drive she reviewed the events of the past three years, and the retrospect did not tend to elevate her spirits or rejoice her heart, in truth she was sick of herself—sick of the endless round of teaching, weary of thinking of what might have been; tired of the eternal pinching, hoarding, and saving, and discouraged at the small amount she was, after all her economy, enabled to put by.

Of one thing, however, she never wearied—of nursing and tending her poor stricken, helpless parent, who now leaning totally on her for comfort and support, had become childishly fond of his 'good daughter Dora,' whom he would never from choice have had for one moment from his side.

True his love was selfish as of yore—he liked her near him; therefore never thought of considering if her constant watchfulness were injuring her health, of asking if she were not tired, not weary; but still it is something to feel we are necessary to the happiness of one human being, to know there is one person upon earth who could not exist without us, who would never be tended with such earnest care by any one else, who would miss the well-known presence every moment of the day. The deep love of a woman's heart is her bane, and still her comfort: it often proves a heavy trial, a bitter curse, and yet it would be impossible for her to live without it.

Thus the current of Dora's thoughts flowed back to earlier years, and the dark hours which had succeeded them; to the memory of events long since forgotten, of the life she led when they moved about from place to place, of the quiet lovely cottage, of her dead mother, and she felt as she remembered that parent's early teachings how peaceful it would be to die, if that debt were but paid, and if her father also were freed from all the pains, troubles, cares, sorrows, ills of existence.

But she had much yet to do in life, so she reflected when alighting from the coach she walked through streets thronged with unknown faces; and finally arriving at Miss Enstridge's lodgings was ushered into a well-furnished drawing-room, where she sat down whilst the servant went to inform that lady of her arrival.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

DORA had not long to consider what the lady she had come to see might resemble, for she was not in the room two minutes before the abrupt opening of the door startled her out of the reverie in which she might have been tempted to indulge, and gave admittance at the same time to Miss Enstridge.

She was a short, emphatic-looking little woman, who lifted her feet and set them down again with the air of a person who was not to be trifled with.

The quick glance of her rather small but very keen gray eyes said as plainly as any words could have done, 'If you think you can impose upon me you will find yourself mistaken.'

She looked at Dora when she entered, as though she were an enemy, and after just bending sufficiently to signify she saw a stranger before her, seated herself with a decided air on the hardest chair in the room, directly opposite her visitor, glancing wickedly at her all the while as if she would have said, 'Now I am prepared for you.'

But poor Dora was so much embarrassed and dismayed by the extraordinary reception, that the words she had intended to say suddenly vanishing from her memory she found it impossible to utter a syllable until Miss Enstridge said somewhat sharply—

‘You wished to speak to me, I believe: I am Miss Enstridge.’

‘You advertised for lodgings the other day,’ commenced Dora timidly.

‘Yes, I did,’ was the laconic reply.

‘Mr Imlach said I had better call and speak to you,’ she resumed.

‘Mr Imlach, rector of Ilpingden?’ interrogated Miss Enstridge.

‘Yes; he thought perhaps you might like our neighbourhood—that is—as—as you wished for lodgings in the country,’ stammered Dora.

‘Well, you do not want a lodger I should think,’ answered the spinster.

‘We do, indeed,’ replied Dora gently, ‘and if our house and neighbourhood would suit I should be very glad. Mr Imlach gave me this note for you.’

Miss Enstridge accepted the proffered missive, but then immediately laid it down on the table, as though she were determined not to be influenced in her choice of a residence by anybody living.

‘And why do you want a lodger?’ she demanded.

The blood rushed up into Dora’s face at the abrupt question, but perhaps with equal abruptness she responded straightforwardly—

‘Because the money would be very useful.’

‘Thank Heaven!’ exclaimed Miss Enstridge, with fervour, ‘that I have at length met with some one who does not let apartments for the mere pleasure of having a stranger tramping up and down stairs at all hours of the night, and not being able to call her house her own for a single hour: but, tell me,’ she suddenly added, ‘you are not mistress of a house, are you?—I do not quite understand!’

‘My father and I live together,’ explained Dora; ‘I teach—but desire to add a little more to our income.’

‘And what is your father?’ inquired the spinster.

‘He was an officer,’ replied Dora.

‘But now?’

‘A confirmed invalid,’ said the young girl, sadly.

Miss Enstridge looked intently at her for a moment: then suddenly exclaimed—her keen eyes becoming doubly intent as she spoke:—

‘You and I have met before, child—where was it?’

Dora started at the question. Yes, they certainly had seen each other, at some remote time—some place! where was it?

‘Ah! I remember now,’ said the girl: a memory of her weary search recurring to her mind: ‘I remember now: I saw you the first morning I ever was in London in my life.’

‘Quite right—looking for lodgings; singular coincidence we should now encounter each other again when you are in search of a lodger; hope you found what suited you that day?’

‘I followed your advice, and answered an advertisement,’ was the response.

‘And what did the result prove?’ demanded Miss Enstridge.

‘What lodgings, I presume, usually do,’ replied Dora: ‘as unlike home and comfort as possible.’

‘Not altogether a bad definition by way of a general rule,’ replied the spinster; ‘but there are exceptions—numerous ones, even to the *desagrémens* of “furnished apartments:” there are such things as pleasant, comfortable rooms, civil servants, and unobtrusive mistresses, to be met with even in London, on moderate terms, but I admit they are difficult to get at—very: and strangers who manage to hit on them may consider themselves fortunate beyond the majority of their fellows. But your face: I remember it struck me before, I feel to have seen it, or else something very like it, in former days, and to have known it, too!’

Dora shook her head. ‘She had never met Miss Enstridge till she came to London.’

‘And your name is Delorme, is not it?’

‘Yes; Dora Delorme.’

‘Dora!’ repeated Miss Enstridge, but the word sounded strange to her ear. ‘I do not know,’ said she, after a long

pause, 'but you strongly resemble some one—I shall remember whom in time; meanwhile the likeness is pleasant to me.'

'I was never told before I resembled any one excepting my mother,' said Dora, who began to feel more at home with her singular companion, and to desire to win her good-will.

'Your mother, child!' returned the spinster quickly, 'and her name?'

'Was Selina,' responded Dora. 'I believe I am called after her mother.'

'Tell me,' said Miss Enstridge, fairly getting up from her seat, and taking Dora's pale face between her hands, and gazing into it till it ceased to be white, and became suffused with a rich brilliant colour, 'tell me, was it your father that misguided girl, Selina Zuriel, ran away with and married?'

Oh, the wild rush of old memories, old loves, old sorrows, present griefs, that caused such a torrent of tears to stream from the large, soft, beautiful eyes; what a perfect world of emotion swelled up in Dora's heart at the question. Answer it! She could do nothing but weep—weep as for long she had not done, tears mingled of great bitterness, and softened emotion, and tender melancholy.

'There, there, do not cry so,' said Miss Enstridge, her own voice sounding strangely tremulous the while, 'I did not mean to grieve you; so you are her child, pretty Selina Zuriel (oh! what a pretty girl she was), grand-daughter of Dorothy Zuriel, whom I once went to see; she said she hoped Selina and I would always be friends, but circumstances separated us, and she has now gone where earthly friends are of no avail; but, please God, Dora, I will be a friend and a steady one to you, if you will let me;' and the spinster's usually hard countenance relaxed so wonderfully in its expression as she uttered these words, that the girl, by way of answer, somehow twined her arms around the other's neck and kissed the face of her mother's friend.

How many years was it since any word or sentence of hers had won similar token of confidence from young or old; there was a choking sensation in the breast of Frances Enstridge, as the hot tears fell scalding on her cheek, tears wrung from young bright eyes—from a very innocent heart, by a word of hers; by a mutual memory of the dead.

‘And so you are *her* child, and she who had you was forced to die, and I, who have no one, am left to live,’ half spoke, half soliloquized the spinster; ‘yes, I can trace the likeness now; your hair is darker, and your face is paler, and your eyes larger than hers; and there is a look of sense or obstinacy or something about you which she never had; she was a gentle, foolish, loving creature—and what sort of man is your father?’

‘She loved him, so do I,’ said Dora.

‘Humph, you might both have managed to be far too fond of him, I dare say, if he had been nothing remarkable either in the way of goodness or cleverness; I want to know what sort of person he is—extravagant, eh?’

‘He has been very unfortunate,’ said the daughter.

‘Never knew a spendthrift yet who was not,’ responded Miss Enstridge.

Oh, no!’ vehemently interposed Dora, ‘not that. All things went wrong; he was unhappily situated. He was so suddenly ruined—so grievously afflicted! If you knew how fond he is of me—if you could but imagine how I love him—’

‘Well, well, child,’ returned Miss Enstridge, as Dora suddenly paused in her excited appeal, ‘I can imagine it all, and so we will not talk of that any more at present. You want an inmate to help to make all ends meet; is it not so? Well, I will be that inmate for a time, till we can see how we can get on together—if it be possible for us to agree.’

‘I must explain how we are situated before you finally decide,’ said Dora, recovering her usual self-possession. ‘My father is in wretched health, perhaps you would dislike residing in the house with an invalid?’

‘No objection,’ returned Miss Enstridge, ‘to anything but children and elegant young ladies who are just “coming out.” I don’t profess to be a philanthropist, brimful of love to my fellow-creatures of every shade and variety of disagreeableness, but still, if not perfectly intolerable, I can bear with them; and I do not think, though I do not care particularly for them, that they ought to be superior to all the “ills that flesh is heir to.”’

‘I teach music,’ Dora continued, without directly replying to the remark, for she now began thoroughly to understand



that if her new friend were kind she was also undoubtedly peculiar. 'I teach music, and have consequently pupils for some hours each day, and our house is not nearly so well furnished as this.'

'Good gracious!' snappishly interrupted Miss Enstridge, 'one might conclude from your conversation that the sole happiness of life exists in sitting upon soft sofas out of sight and sound of a human being. No, no,' she added, 'all I bargain for is,—no infant or child as a *resident* in the house, and no fashionable young ladies as visitors in it. Now, if you can guarantee me against these annoyances, I will promise to go and live with you, without seeing your cottage, or having more than a dim idea of your father.'

'Oh,' cried Dora, 'you will like him, I know—you could not help doing so.'

'Not quite sure of that,' murmured Miss Enstridge, 'but with regard to the rest—'

'No child—no young lady,' said Dora eagerly.

'Excepting yourself,' smiled Miss Enstridge.

'Ah, but I am not a fashionable one,' replied the girl, whereupon her new friend earnestly 'thanked Heaven she believed she was not, but,' she added, 'just, I suppose, when I am comfortably settled down in this Ilpingden place, you will be marrying, and so dislodging me again; for no doubt, like most young misses, you consider a husband the object and end of life—get up for him, eat for him, drink for him, sleep, walk, talk, and get money for him! Pshaw! I declare there is enough of absurdity in this world to make a sensible person renounce it!—always and ever striving to gain that, which, when once obtained, generally turns out to be a chimera, or worse than a chimera. When I see a woman taking an incredible amount of trouble to make a fool of herself, I think, "my dear, you imagine him an angel now, but just wait for a little while and you will find out your mistake—perhaps consider the thoughtless, happy girl more to be envied than the miserable matron, who the moment she touched her idol found it crumble into dust."'

'I do not think,' said Dora with a smile, when Miss Enstridge paused, because she had exhausted not her subject, but her breath, 'I do not think you need fear my marrying.'

‘And why not?’ demanded Miss Enstridge, as angrily and abruptly as though she had been strenuously advocating the holy state of matrimony, instead of vehemently denouncing those who recklessly rushed into it; ‘and why not?’

‘Because I have so many other things to think of,’ said Dora, rather at a loss for a reason, and yet resolved to give one.

Miss Enstridge did not reply, but fixed her keen gray eyes steadily on Dora’s face; perhaps she read there, that storms had ruffled the girl’s soul—she saw the outward signs of the shadow which rested on the young heart; she learned she had been thrown with the world more as men generally are than women; that her path had led her into rough contact with the denizens of earth, to be jostled by rude hands, not aided and helped, like most young females, along the rugged road of life.

There was a lull: Miss Enstridge’s thoughts ran back to that old room where she once had seen the ‘skeleton’ of Zuriel’s magnificent palace; and this was that woman’s grandchild—truly, next to partings, meetings are the most curious things in life. How strange we think such rencontres, though they are of daily occurrence: their frequency, somehow, never seems to reconcile us to them, or makes us consider them natural; partings, we come at length resignedly to believe, are to be our portion here below—they never surprise, no matter how deeply they may grieve us; but meetings, like pieces of unexpected good fortune, overwhelm our understanding—we cannot comprehend how it has possibly come to pass, that we should encounter a friend where friend was never expected to be.

How curiously the paths of different individuals cross each other; how each has for years pursued his own separate route, knowing nothing of the other; destined at some future time, sooner or later, to prove a friend or an enemy—to alter his life in some way: to make or to mar; to cheer or to annoy; to grieve or to console. And thus, in London, Frances Enstridge met with the grandchild of her who had first taught her happiness dwelt not always in the midst of luxury; and Dora Delorme, looking for a lady to assist her favourite plan of money-making, chanced to encounter one who had been her mother’s companion in the days when both were young, ere the cares of the world had overtaken either of them.

It was impossible for Miss Enstridge not to feel an interest in Selina's daughter : it was equally impossible for Dora not to be irresistibly attracted to the strange, quaint little spinster, who once had known her mother, and who, so at least the girl imagined, was kindly disposed towards her. How could Dora help liking her, when she was so lonely on the earth !

'I shall tell you frankly,' said Miss Enstridge, 'why I mean to leave London : I am quitting it, not because I am especially fond of flat fields, and dusty hedge-rows, and dirty roads, and being unable to get a single article you may require without sending miles for it—no, I am not leaving town for what Londoners sneeringly call "love of the country"—but just to get peace : to free myself, in one short word, of my relatives, who would come to London, spite of all I could do to prevent them—who would go through five thousand a-year, if the amount were paid to them quarterly—who must have metropolitan society ; who have managed to get into the bosom of mother church, and fall, somehow, into a comfortable town parish, where the "duty," as it is called, is light, because the clergyman (that's my sister-in-law's husband, if you can comprehend the relationship) never thinks of doing what I consider his duty : and one daughter is married "well," as her mother says, and she wants to get the others settled too—and they persist I must feel "lonely" in my lodgings, and so come over daily to amuse me—nice amusement, truly ! to hear a discussion about bonnets, and flowers, and tucks, and dance music ; and who looked well, and who looked ill, at the last ball ; and who is paying attention to whom ; and which young lady is a flirt, and which Miss Jones is a prude. Pshaw ! I am sick of being bored to death, and I won't bear it any longer—I am determined I won't, if I should go to seek rest and quietness among the Esquimaux.' And Miss Enstridge looked so resolutely angry when she concluded, that Dora, fearing to irritate her by smiling at what she had at first considered as mere badinage, remained gravely silent.

'But why need I weary you with a detail of my grievances !' said the spinster, more calmly : 'let us speak more of your plan, or rather, let us settle some plan at once. I like you, child—I liked your mother, and I do not see why there should not be some resemblance between you in character, as well as in

feature. I always feel a preference for any one whose face in the least degree resembles any one of the people I was fond of years ago: it is a foolish fancy some think, and it may be so; but somehow, I imagine our views of character are more just in youth: and so when I see a countenance that reminds me of one I liked in days gone by, I say, I am sure there must be good in the disposition, no matter how little, and I will look earnestly for it—therefore, I will go to see this Ilpingden place: come to you, that is, as you say you really and truly desire to have a stranger in the house with you.'

'We do,' returned Dora; for Miss Enstridge had uttered the last sentence in a rather inquiring tone.

'Very well,' said the lady, 'so much for that: now, do you like the people there?'

'Some of them,' Dora answered.

'For "some" read "none," eh? was the quick retort.

'No, indeed,' said Dora, colouring up to her eyes however; 'there are a few I like greatly.'

'*Very* few then,' persisted Miss Enstridge; 'at least, so I judge, from the tone of your first reply. How long have you been there?'

'Two years.'

'Humph! long enough to become attached or get wearied, to love or to hate. I will drive out to-morrow: or, stay, if you have anything to do for an hour or so, I might return with you to-day—I shall be quite ready in an hour; would that suit you?'

'Perfectly!' said Dora; and so the matter was arranged, and she left Miss Enstridge till the time appointed.

After she quitted the house, she crossed the street, and naturally enough glanced up at the windows, to compare mental notes between its external appearance and that of her own house—notes by no means favourable to the latter, certainly. Miss Enstridge had planted herself at the casement to look after Dora, who smiled in answer to the nod vouchsafed her by the spinster.

Why should that bright look have caused the lady to turn away with tears in her eyes?

In the course of another month, Miss Enstridge was settled in Ilpingden: and every mortal in the place, who was anybody had called upon her!

## CHAPTER XXVII.

NOTHING, excepting a sincere desire to treat with unbounded respect the name of any individual possessed of the 'sinews of war,' could have prevented my mentioning at the conclusion of the last chapter, that Dora Delorme encountered, on the occasion of her visit to London in search of a lodger, another old acquaintance, Conroy Bradshaw, Esquire. How this came to pass, and why the sight of that individual did not prove exceedingly annoying to the object of his former admiration, will require some explanation.

When Mr Bradshaw swore, that find Dora Delorme he would, 'if she was above-ground,' he forgot a certain homely adage concerning the difficulty of 'looking for a needle in a bottle of straw,' which was peculiarly applicable to his own intention: in fine, it was not till he had discovered, that 'London, or neighbourhood,' is about as vague a direction as 'The World,' that in sheer disgust, he gave up the chase, and bethought him he would try another scheme—one which could do no harm, and might do much good—one which he mightily wondered had never previously occurred to him. Yes! without even so far turning out of his route as to go to Orpen, and see how his sister was managing affairs during his absence, he started straight off to Stor Court, in order to obtain an interview with its possessor.

'Egad,' soliloquized Mr Bradshaw, as he leisurely strolled along the drive, taking minute cognizance of every tree and shrub, flower, and blade of grass, 'egad, this is a deucedly nice place. What a confoundedly lucky fellow Delorme might have been, and what a perfect idiot his wife made of herself. I have heard—faith, and I believe the tale too—that the Earl of Faberleigh proposed for her after she was married! How angry old Zuriel must have been to be sure, no wonder he turned her out of doors—I should, had I been in his place, I know!' And even as he uttered this Christian and charitable, but most truthful, remark, he paused to notice the house, which a turn of the avenue now revealed to view, and after he had counted the long line of windows, noticed the wings, the ter-



race, the entrance, the long flights of steps, the spreading lawns, and the rare and lovely flowers, he once again resumed his lounging walk, murmuring: 'What a confounded thing to lose such a place—begin to wish now I had not seen it—makes me want to marry the girl more than ever—would take her without it though,' he magnanimously added, which was indeed a most generous *finale* to a liberal speech, because it was spoken just in front of a mansion, the beauties of which were increased and not diminished by a nearer view.

'Suppose he'll be as hard to get a sight of as one of the blood royal, or—his grandchild,' was Mr Bradshaw's mental reflection, which induced him to inform the servant who received his card that he desired to 'speak with Mr Zuriel on most particular business,' a message which the man delivered to his master after he had scanned the visitor from head to foot, and wondered who the 'low-bred fellow could be, and what under the sun he wanted with Mr Zuriel?'

'Is it a petition?' demanded that gentleman.

'I think not, sir,' responded the servant; 'he don't look altogether as if he was coming a-begging.'

'Well, do you think he's coming a-giving?' savagely retorted Mr Zuriel, whose temper was almost unendurable.

'No, sir,' replied the man with imperturbable calmness. '*I am sure* he is not.'

'Well, say I am busy,' returned Mr Zuriel; 'I can't see him,' and with this satisfactory answer the man retraced his steps to Mr Bradshaw, whom he had left standing in the hall till he should learn his master's pleasure concerning him.

'Ask Mr Zuriel when he will be disengaged, and I shall have the honour of waiting on him again. Any hour will suit me, but see him I must.'

'Pretty stiff,' thought the servant, elevating his eye-brows; 'wonder what's in the wind, but I'll take his message any way, for even a lark like this is a variety in this dungeon of a place. Please, sir,' he said, once again opening the library door, 'the—the gentleman wishes to know when you will be disengaged?'

'Never,' returned Mr Zuriel. 'Well!' he added, seeing that the man did not immediately retire, 'what are you waiting for?'



‘He says, sir, his business is most important.’

‘And what does his business signify to me?’ demanded the old man testily. ‘I can’t see him.’

‘Please, sir, I told him that, and he replied that he must speak with you,’ answered the servant, who rather enjoyed the affair than otherwise.

‘Well, I won’t speak with him,’ returned Mr Zuriel, ‘let him send in his message, or write to me;’ and he resumed his important occupation, which consisted in looking out of the windows, and thinking of former times—of other days.

‘If you please, sir,’ said the servant, once again entering, a subdued smile hovering round the corners of his mouth, ‘the gentleman won’t send his message, and he can’t write.’

‘Can’t he?’ exclaimed Mr Zuriel; ‘he can speak, at any rate, and make you do so, sir! I can’t see him, and I won’t see him, nor anybody else: and if you come with any more messages from him, why, you may go, that’s all!’

‘Why, sir,’ represented the man, who was perfectly accustomed to these fits of ill-temper, ‘I would not have carried this last message, only he declared, if he should wait for ever, he would have an interview with you.’

‘Ah! he said that, did he?’ returned his master, fairly roused at length: ‘can’t say I dislike the spirit of perseverance it exhibits; tell him—or, stay—confound the fellow! show him in;’ and John Zuriel, having issued this command in a voice resembling nothing so much as the growl of a bear, when about to spring on its prey, retired to a large easy-chair, and ensconcing himself in it, grimly awaited the advent of his foe.

Nothing daunted by the difficulty of obtaining an interview—by the magnificence of the house, or the insufficiency of his business, Mr Bradshaw entered: and as the servant closed the door behind him, he advanced up the long library to where its owner sat enthroned, and bowing to that individual, said—

‘Mr Zuriel, I believe?’

‘Mr Bradshaw, I conclude!’ retorted the lord of Stor Court, glancing first at the card, and then at the man whose name it bore, as if to see that the two tallied,—‘Mr Bradshaw, I conclude!’

'At your service,' added Conroy, with such perfect *sang froid*, that Mr Zuriel felt himself almost moved to admiration by his consistent effrontery.

'Nay, sir,' he returned, 'for a few minutes, I am at yours. My time is much occupied, but as you said your business was urgent, I thought it better to see you at once.'

'Something on the same principle, I suppose, as that which frequently induces a lady to marry a troublesome suitor, in order to get rid of him,' remarked Conroy, with a smile so shrewd, and common, and undaunted in its expression, that the millionaire felt rather at a loss whether to listen to his 'business' patiently, or order the servant to show him to the door.

'You are pleased to be facetious, sir,' said Mr Zuriel, drily; 'suppose you proceed to the object of your visit at once?'

'Nothing like speaking to the point direct,' acquiesced Mr Bradshaw; who thought such a course most likely to propitiate the favourable opinion of the rude old man. 'Nothing like speaking to the point direct: I wish to have a short conversation with you about your grandchild.'

'Sir, I have none!' vehemently broke out the millionaire: 'no child—no grandchild! none!—'

'That you acknowledge—probably not,' assented Conroy, 'but a denial or admission of the fact, does not alter the accuracy of that fact—your grand-daughter—'

'I can hear nothing further on the subject. I ignore the relationship; I—'

'We need not advert to it, then,' suggested his visitor, who having expected such an outburst, was not dismayed by it; 'I can proceed without insisting that you are in any way connected with any one. We will speak of the young lady as Miss Delorme; or, if you dislike the name of her spendthrift father, as Miss Dora.'

'Ah! you have no love for him, then—for that man? pshaw! what am I talking about? in Heaven's name, sir, where and to what is all this preamble tending?'

'To an end, if you will permit me to proceed,' explained Conroy, who felt by no means ill-pleased to note how the subject moved the old man, even though it roused him to anger; 'but you ask if I have no love for him? and I answer, "I have not;" I think him a proud pauper; a reckless, selfish, in-

considerate spendthrift, who would go through a fortune tomorrow, if he had it.'

He paused: the millionaire's searching glance had been fastened upon him during the delivery of the above sentence; and the result of the investigation was so unfavourable, that when Mr Bradshaw concluded, expecting to hear some sentiment of approval or concurrence, he merely replied, in his most sardonic tone:

'Pray proceed, sir—to an end.'

Conroy bit his lips. This was not the mood he desired to encourage; wherefore he resumed:

'Your daughter's child—'

'You were good enough to say, you would remember that I have no relations,' suggested Mr Zuriel, in a voice like the east wind—so cold, dry, and cutting was its sound.

'Ah! I forgot,' remarked Mr Bradshaw: 'Miss Dora is now a beautiful young lady—as good, and humble, and economical, as her father is the reverse: a sensible, gentle creature, who has now for some time been supporting him by the exercise of her talents.'

Once again Conroy paused: he saw a flush mount to the old man's temples; he understood he desired to learn more, but would have died before demanding information. The conversation was becoming interesting to him, but awkward to Mr Bradshaw—had the other asked even a single question, how rapidly he could have proceeded; as it was, the task of developing his 'business' became each moment one of greater difficulty.

'Yes! in a manner most creditable to herself,' resumed Mr Bradshaw, 'she has devoted and is devoting the best years of her life solely for his advantage: she has pupils to whom—'

'Did you come here, sir, solely to tell me my grandchild was a teacher?' thundered Mr Zuriel, whose patience was not proof against this second attack.

'Not your grandchild,' replied Conroy, who seeing his advantage, was not slow to avail himself of it; 'not your grandchild, but Miss Dora Delorme, the daughter of a certain paralytic Major. May I tell you how it came to pass?'

'If it bear on the business which brought you to this house,' sullenly answered Mr Zuriel, 'you may; if not, eschew the

subject : and in either case, pray be brief—my time is valuable.

‘Years ago,’ returned Mr Bradshaw (who knew the millionaire’s history off by heart, and fancied he comprehended his character, and the weak points in it, also), ‘years ago, Delorme and I were schoolfellows ; he being what is termed a gentleman by birth, looked down on me, whose father made a large fortune more honestly than the Delormes ever squandered theirs. He entered the army ; I went back to the place which my father purchased when he retired from business—there I have resided ever since. Do I weary you, sir ?’

‘Not much,’ was Mr Zuriel’s polite rejoinder ; ‘pray proceed.

‘Delorme’s wife’—once again a change came over the old man’s face—‘fell into delicate health ; he was ordered to India : the physicians said such a journey would kill her—prescribed rest, peace, quietness ; and so, to meet their views, and also to humour the whim of an old military colonel, named Lesparde, the Captain bought a cottage for his dying wife, near Orpen, my native place—and went with his regiment abroad. Years passed away : the lady’s health did not mend—some said, a broken heart carried her to her grave ; others, that consumption was the immediate cause of her dissolution : one thing I know, that on the very night when her husband, promoted to the rank of major, returned from India, she died.’

Mr Bradshaw looked in the rich man’s countenance, as he uttered the last words, but not a muscle moved ; he might have been hearing the story of some total stranger, not of the fair, fragile being, who once had been his child—his darling—the glad spirit of that fairy palace ; the light of her father’s heart ; his pride—his sorrow ; the being whom he had cursed.

‘I am at a loss, sir,’ he said, in a harsh, grating voice, ‘to understand how this detail can possibly affect your business.’

‘I will speedily show you,’ resumed Conroy, who comprehended perfectly, that this indifference was merely assumed :—‘The mother then, as I have stated, died ; and the father was left alone—alone, save for one child, a daughter, who proved the image of her deceased parent ; and to this day resembles her in all things, as I understand, save one, namely, that to Dora Delorme the command of her worthless father is law.’

Mr Bradshaw did not flinch under the angry glance which

gleamed at him from beneath the old man's shaggy eyebrows. He noted how his frame trembled—how powerfully his words moved him: so, with inward exultation, he proceeded:

‘Gradually, the child changed into a beautiful girl. So secluded a life did she lead, that, until about a year since, I never even saw her. Delorme had no company at the cottage: he lived like a hermit, when there—although the course he pursued whilst in Orpen was one of ceaseless extravagance, riot, and excess. Wherever a race was held; wherever gamblers assembled; wherever the dice-box was produced; there Delorme might be found. He sold first one piece of property, then another; raised money by bond, mortgage, loan: at length, all his resources were exhausted—he was beggared. He did not know whence to procure the wherewithal to pay a debt of honour he owed to a certain Captain Ermington, and in that dilemma, he bethought him of applying to me.’

‘I see—when he thought you could serve him?’

‘Precisely: for years, no close intimacy had subsisted betwixt us; time had brought prudence with it to me—poverty and an addition of pride to him. Men of real standing were shy of associating with so reckless a character; the few old friends he once possessed having died off, their successors and heirs looked coldly upon him. I had no desire to mix with his set of semi-fashionables—men who would have robbed me as deliberately as pickpockets, though, perhaps, in a more gentlemanlike manner—therefore, there had been little intercourse between us: our paths were different, till he chose, for his own ends, to cross mine, and earnestly invite me to dinner.’

‘May I beg you to proceed?’ that had been the refrain of Mr Zuriel's song since the commencement of the conversation; but it did not delude Conroy, who returned:

‘Certainly; I am doing so. Foolishly, I went to see one of the loveliest beings that ever existed; to dine with the most unprincipled man that ever breathed. Well, I knew the man was a beggar; I knew he had nothing he could call his own—I declined to lend him the money he required, but I offered to *give* it to him on certain conditions.’

‘Indeed!’ ejaculated the millionaire: ‘and what were they?’



‘First: that I should be permitted to visit occasionally at the house; and if I thought it desirable ultimately to propose for his daughter, that he would endeavour to obtain her consent.’

‘A most fair proposition; a most reasonable demand!’ said Mr Zuriel: ‘of course he jumped at the offer?’

‘No,’ returned Mr Bradshaw, deceived by the words: ‘no, indeed; he refused it as though he had been a king, and I the meanest subject in his dominions.’

‘What bait did you throw out?’ demanded Mr Zuriel.

‘What he required,’ returned Mr Bradshaw: ‘five hundred pounds.’

‘Ah! it was not quite sufficient—you should have tried him with a thousand,’ remarked Mr Zuriel.

‘I do not think even that would have produced the desired effect,’ said Conroy, dimly comprehending the old man was really sneering at him: ‘but, be that as it may, he declined the offer. I refused to advance the money on no security, as a loan, and so the matter dropped; and I heard little more about him for the space of nearly three months, when, suddenly, it was rumoured, that the Major had been stricken with paralysis—that creditors were pouring down on him—that everything was to be sold off—that Lesparde, nephew to the old Colonel, had been entrapped into putting his name on a bill, the whole of which he would have to pay: and every syllable of the news proved true. The Major was sold up; he and his daughter left Orpen—nobody knew when, nor why, nor how, nor where. Lesparde, a desperately cautious, stingy, but still pleasant enough and gentlemanly fellow, had to meet the bill with five hundred pounds cash; and, after the nine days’ wonder had subsided, the officer and Miss Dora were as completely forgotten as though they had never been.’

‘Neither a very interesting nor uncommon story,’ remarked Mr Zuriel. ‘Is that the conclusion?’

How willingly Mr Bradshaw could have annihilated the speaker where he sat: he had previously come in contact occasionally with men of birth, who snubbed him, and kept him at a distance; and he, by way of revenge, had scoffed at birth, and said he could buy the proud paupers up: but this mixture



of pride of money and pride of position in one individual, was something he had never heretofore encountered. The gloomy, sour, unfathomable disposition; the control of emotion, the power of repressing outward feeling and of galling to the quick the feelings of others! Conroy found himself amazed, confounded, almost abashed, in the presence of the misanthropical old man, whose obstinacy and savageness of character gave him an advantage over most with whom he came in warlike contact.

‘It is not its conclusion!’ said the visitor, after a pause; ‘but if you desire to be troubled no further with the detail, perhaps I had better stop.’

‘It would be a pity for you to do so, after having gone so far,’ retorted the old man; ‘more especially, as you are evidently anxious to finish the story.’

‘And do you feel no anxiety to hear the end of it?’ demanded Mr Bradshaw.

‘Much—not indeed to hear the end of it, but to have done with it,’ was the reply.

‘Then,’ said Mr Bradshaw, ‘as I said before, perhaps I had better stop.’

‘If you will ensure me against a future visit, to unburden yourself of the remainder—I fully concur in your opinion,’ replied Mr Zuriel.

An angry glow flushed Mr Bradshaw’s face; he felt he had lost his temporary advantage, never to regain it; there was no apparent way left of touching the old man’s heart; whatever he might feel, the time for demonstrating it was past. Should he go, or proceed; give up the game, or throw once again—he could lose nothing by proceeding, save his temper. He would adopt the latter course.

‘I do not know, sir,’ he began, in a different tone from that he had employed during the preceding portion of the conversation: ‘I do not know, sir, how much or how little of this indifference may be real or assumed; one thing I am positive of, that if the mention of your daughter’s name, or of that of her child, have—’

‘You are trespassing on forbidden ground,’ remarked the other; ‘any allusion to that subject, and I decline further conversation, whether you desire it or not.’

‘If the mention of Mrs Delorme or her daughter has no power to awaken an interest in my narrative, I believe nothing can.’

‘And your belief is correct, sir,’ responded Mr Zuriel: ‘nothing has power to interest, but intrusion and loquacity are still capable of annoying me.’

‘As I came here to tell my story, *I will*,’ said Mr Bradshaw, doggedly, ‘whether it interest, or annoy, or please *you*, I am resolved to gratify myself.’

‘May I request you to do so quickly, then?’ growled Mr Zuriel, leaning back in his chair.

‘Major Delorme and his daughter left Orpen: and for almost nine months I heard nothing of them, till fate accidentally threw me across their path, in London. There I found Miss Dora teaching, devoting her life to nursing, and tending, and maintaining her invalid father—poor or rich, a governess or an heiress, my attachment for her was incapable of change: in fact, my admiration for her only increased, when I saw how patiently she endured her reverse of fortune. I had never loved her for the sake of money: from the hour my eyes first rested on her, I believed she was a beggar, so my affection was completely disinterested; consequently, in lodgings in London, I renewed the suit I once urged in the cottage near Orpen: and—’

‘Did she accept you, sir?’ demanded Mr Zuriel with sudden vehemence.

‘Why, the young lady herself, I believe, had no objection,’ stammered Mr Bradshaw, ‘but poverty having only increased Major Delorme’s pride, as in former days he had rejected my proposals, so he preferred that his daughter should continue a governess, a teacher, for life, rather than marry a man who could have given her equipages, fine establishment, servants, and—’

‘Himself,’ sneered Mr Zuriel, who appeared gratified in his very soul to hear Mr Bradshaw had been rejected. ‘And Miss Dora, being, as you before implied, an obedient daughter, declined so advantageous an union, and—’

‘Teaches still,’ added Conroy, on the benevolent principle of returning tit for tat.

There was a brief silence. Mr Zuriel waited for some

further remark, but finding none came, at length impatiently exclaimed, 'Well, sir?'

'That is all,' responded Mr Bradshaw.

'Then what the devil brought you here?' inquired the other.

'To tell you this, and to know if you desired the girl to get a good husband.'

'What does it signify to me, whether she has a good, a bad, an indifferent one, or none at all?' was the next question.

'Not much, apparently, I confess,' replied Mr Bradshaw, 'but I was not to know that your heart was so utterly hardened, so—'

'Every one who ever heard of John Zuriel, of Stor Court, sir, knows that he has no heart,' interposed that gentleman; 'but suppose that Heaven had bestowed such an encumbrance upon me; that anything this girl or her father could do were capable of interesting me; still I cannot comprehend the object of this visit, for you say you do not want a portion for nor with her, and that, in fact, you find you cannot get her poor or rich.'

'I came here to request your assistance; her father has carried her off I know not where, and I desired to know if you would forward my views, and enable me to obtain another interview; it is all I ask; money is a matter of no importance to me, I have plenty of my own. I will make liberal settlements; a shilling of your wealth I do not wish to possess, but possibly you could discover their place of abode, though I cannot, and by so doing aid my suit. If you have any influence with Major Delorme, perhaps you might induce him to alter his decision; I have nothing to ask from you but your assistance in this respect: will you give it?'

'No,' responded Mr Zuriel.

'Then my business is concluded,' said Conroy, rising. 'I feel obliged for the patient and polite manner in which you have listened to my story.'

'And by way of proving your gratitude,' rejoined the millionaire, 'will you have the goodness to answer one or two questions before you go?' Mr Bradshaw signified his assent. 'First,' proceeded Mr Zuriel, 'whom does Major Delorme desire that his child should marry?'

'No one, so far as I know,' responded the visitor.

‘You are sure of that?’ inquired Mr Zuriel, fastening a scrutinizing glance on the speaker.

‘To the best of my belief,’ was the answer.

‘And this Lesparde—’ proceeded the millionaire.

‘Is his sworn enemy,’ eagerly returned Mr Bradshaw; ‘for years their intercourse has been of the coldest and most trivial kind.’

‘Yet he put his name on a bill for five hundred pounds for his enemy,’ remarked Mr Zuriel; ‘truly he must be a most Christian and exemplary individual.’

‘He is nothing of the kind,’ retorted Mr Bradshaw; ‘he is a careful, prudent, cautious, stingy, prematurely old, and worldly man; it is to this day a perfect mystery to every one how Major Delorme contrived to get him to sign that document; no one understands it.’

‘Unless he too, whilst hating the father, loved the child,’ suggested Mr Zuriel.

‘Pshaw! *he* would never marry *her*,’ exclaimed Conroy.

‘And why not, pray, sir?’ demanded Mr Zuriel, a flush of irritation suffusing his face; it was the only proof of sensitiveness concerning the position he and his held in the world he had manifested during the interview, and Mr Bradshaw noticing it, responded with eager sarcasm:

‘Because he is as proud as Lucifer, as avaricious as a Jew, as fastidious as an Earl, and as vain as a woman.’

‘Four sufficient reasons,’ remarked Mr Zuriel coolly.

‘And, besides, he is engaged to be married to the Honourable Miss Durrant,’ proceeded Mr Bradshaw.

‘A fifth quite as conclusive as its predecessors,’ returned the millionaire: ‘and now, sir, as you thought fit to thank me for my patient hearing, allow me to do the same to you for your lucid replies, and entertaining narrative; and, also to beg, that as this is the first visit you have paid me, so it may also be the last. I wish to hear nothing more directly or indirectly concerning Major Delorme or his child.’

‘As I came up the avenue to-day,’ said Conroy, his rage and disappointment finding vent at length in one bitter sentence, ‘I wondered your daughter could leave all behind her to elope with such a fellow as her husband, but since I have seen you, my wonder has ceased; for had I been in her

place. I should have gone *anywhere* with *any one*, to free myself from your control.'

'And had I been in Major Delorme's place, when you had the impudence to propose for his child, I should have ordered the servants to turn you out of doors,' was Mr Zuriel's response; 'indeed, without such a provocation, I may even now feel inclined to tell the footman to hasten your departure.'

For an instant, Mr Bradshaw glared fiercely on the owner of Stor Court; that individual regarding him the while with a look of the most sovereign contempt and aversion; then the former turned sullenly towards the door, muttering some angry threat between his teeth, as he did so. Not another syllable passed between them; the library was once again empty; and the old man sank down in his chair, and buried his face in his hands—haunted by the dark spectres of the past, that dwelt with him in that room, and everywhere else, for evermore!

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONROY BRADSHAW, ESQUIRE, returned to London venting maledictions *en route*; invoking in Tom Campbell's words 'the malison of heaven,' or rather, to use a more homely though not less expressive phrase, cursing in the depths of his soul, grand-sire, father, and child, and vaguely vowing vengeance on the whole generation of Zuriels and Delormes. He purposed searching out and finding Dora, and then he further intended marrying her, and so annoying her rich relative, whom he had discovered to be at least as proud, and fifty times more intolerable, than the poor and haughty Major Delorme.

But in vain he paced the city streets, stared at the passers-by, peeped under the ladies' bonnets—sought out Miss Biddy Meekins, first in her lodgings and subsequently in her cellar, after she had changed her Irish name for a briefer English cognomen, tried to intimidate or trap her into a confession.

‘Shure,’ said she, ‘when I know nothin’ I can tell nothin’; if you want to hear lies, why I could say she had gone back to her own place or to Ameriky; but you want to listen only to thruth, and so its beyant me to tell you anything.’

How Mr Bradshaw longed for a thumbscrew or some other instrument of torture to test at once her veracity and her powers of endurance, but such means of extorting information having ceased to be recognized or tolerated by law, he was compelled to leave the woman in undisturbed possession of her secret if she had one, and retire disconsolately to his lodgings, where Miss Griffiths smiled upon and consoled him, and where he remained for some two months longer, nominally looking for Dora, and believing himself that such was the object of his stay, but really being comforted, and flattered, and deluded by Mrs Griffiths and her daughter, the latter of whom he speedily began to perceive ‘was an uncommonly pretty girl.’

It was a remarkably pleasant thing to a man like Mr Bradshaw to be complimented, and talked to, and chatted with, and consulted, and admired, and in plain words wooed, by a young, tolerably good-looking, rather clever girl like Miss Griffiths. After Dora’s cold manners, perpetual rejections, haughty superiority, and indignant refusal, the unbounded deference, and respect, and love of the worthy landlady and her child, gratified his vanity, and their ceaseless flatteries fell like balm of Gilead on his wounded spirit. First he began by sneering at their compliments, which more gradually changed into a smile; then they seemed like tributes of homage to his superiority; finally he took them as a right, liking the hand of the giver the while, and feeling he should miss the incense greatly, and be scarcely able to breathe in a purer atmosphere or in one less laden with adulation; but still he did not exactly get the length of ‘love’ as it is termed, until some spirit of evil putting it into the heart of a London correspondent to write down an account to Mr Bradshaw’s widowed sister of what ‘was going on’—that misguided female left Moorfield, servants, keys, beds and bedding, linen, china, and plate, never to speak of the cellar and its contents, to take care of themselves, and hurried up to London to stop the marriage which she fancied was on the eve of celebration.

Hundreds of carriages would never drive up to the church



door if foolish mothers, sisters, cousins, and aunts, did not fling themselves in the road, and try to turn the horses' heads from the porch; if so many women did not prematurely affirm 'you sha'n't,' scores upon scores of moustachioed mouths would pause before uttering the irrevocable vow, 'I will.'

Oh! they may talk as they like of marriages being made in heaven, but the one half of them are made in anger, thought of after a squabble on the subject around the domestic hearth—men—ay, and for that matter, women too, go stubbornly to the altar, not so much for love of anything they expect to meet there, as to prove they are independent beings, who will take their own way even along the road of matrimony, in spite of reason, prudence, and relatives. And thus Mr Bradshaw might never have absolutely fallen into the trap matrimonial, had not his sister, in her extreme desire to keep him out of it, set her foot upon the spring, which forthwith going off, caught the unhappy man, and precluded all hope of rescue. Oh! the wars which were fought between Conroy and the widow, and the widow and Mrs Griffiths, and the widow and Miss Griffiths, until finally Mr Bradshaw obtained peace by dismissing his sister from the unremunerative post she had heretofore held in his establishment, and hastened back to Orpen, to see that the whole place did not go to 'rack and ruin,' but, before he departed, Mrs Griffiths took a quiet opportunity of consulting him as to whether she ought to encourage the pretensions of a 'West-end tailor,' who made clothes for the 'Court,' and aspired to her daughter's hand, informing him at the same time she thought it a good match, but that she did not like to countenance him till she had asked Mr Bradshaw's advice, as she did not want to throw the girl away, 'her grandma having lately died and left her an uncommon deal of money.'

'No, no,' said Conroy, abruptly, after a few minutes' sullen reflection: 'hang it, don't throw the girl away; don't say "yes," to an upstart of a presumptuous tailor, send him away; and I—yes—yes egad, I'll marry the girl myself.'

Which generous proposal Mrs Griffiths, tears streaming from her eyes, blessed him for, and Conroy hastened away home, an engaged man.

Not to repent, however. Had he repented he would speedily have abandoned Miss Griffiths to her fate, as he did

not chance to be an individual who regarded any promise as binding which he could break with impunity. Moorfield seemed stupid, slow, tiresome, lonely after London—London and flattery; how insipid the speech of humble mortals seemed after the flowery, elegant, and complimentary remarks which had flowed like honey from the lips of Mrs Griffiths and her daughter; his vanity had been pleased, and his obstinacy aroused; if these two were not cause and sufficient to make him marry, why a third might be found, in the fact that he was determined not to wear the willow for that insolent piece of creation, Dora Delorme; to show he could get a pretty wife, one with a little money too; and to move to sorrow and repentance the heart of the proud beauty who, when she heard of the wedding, would he felt sure bemoan her own folly in not taking him—when she could get him.

Accordingly he went back to town, and married the sky-blue damsel, who from thenceforth discarding flattery, tried to rule her husband, but finding that trick, as Conroy expressed it, 'no go,' they squabbled, and wrangled, and quarrelled, and got reconciled, and kept separate purses, and schemed and counter-schemed, and manœuvred till the end of their lives.

Mrs Bradshaw desired that her 'mamma' should reside with them, but Mr Bradshaw speedily and emphatically putting his veto on the matter by saying, 'he would see her d——d first,' Mrs Griffiths was obliged to compromise the matter by taking a house in a genteel part of London, and 'letting off' a portion by the year,' or, in plainer words, still 'letting apartments;' which latter circumstance, escaping the memory of the mistress of Moorfield, she entertained her especial circle of friends and gossips with accounts of the 'beautiful house her mamma had at the West-end,' and the 'titled guests and friends she received there,' and when Conroy and his bride went to London they felt it grand to go to the neighbourhood of Belgrave Square, and have their Moorfield letters directed to such an aristocratic locality; and in consideration of Mrs Griffiths never charging them anything for the apartments they occupied when they were in town, Mr Bradshaw magnanimously overlooked the fact of her letting lodgings, and did not *very* frequently remark to his spouse

what a 'deucedly awkward and unpleasant thing it was to have a landlady for a mother-in-law.'

This interesting pair, chancing not only to be in London, but also proceeding from Mrs Griffiths' abode just as Dora was coming from Pimlico, espied that young lady, and Conroy eagerly arrested her steps with—

'I say, Miss Delorme, confoundedly glad to see you.'

Dora started at the sound of that hated voice, but the moment she saw the *ci-devant* Miss Griffiths' canary-coloured kid glove resting on the sleeve of her husband's superfine black-cloth coat, a happy conviction darted into her mind that he was 'settled'—which conviction, carrying with it peace and contentment to her soul, brought a bright smile to her face as she returned his greeting.

Mrs Bradshaw withdrew her hand from its previous abiding-place and graciously extended it to Miss Delorme with a rather condescending air, whilst Conroy explained that he had in very truth become a Benedict since he and the Major's daughter last parted: 'suppose, though,' he added, 'you saw it long ago in the paper?'

Dora had not: but late as her congratulations undoubtedly were, she begged most sincerely to offer, and Mr Bradshaw and his wife were graciously pleased to accept, them, although they concluded Miss Delorme was still a teacher.

'And how is your father?' demanded Conroy.

'Much worse,' returned Dora, sadly; 'he is indeed very ill.'

'And where are you living, eh?' pursued her questioner.

'In the country,' vaguely answered the girl, whereupon Mr Bradshaw expressed much regret that he could not call and see her and his old friend, the Major, for that to pay a visit in town he found hard enough, but one in the country impossible; after which they all shook hands once again with a show of apparent cordiality and separated; Dora feeling as though some old dread and horror were removed, and Mr Bradshaw wishing—what could never be now.

'How wonderfully Miss Delorme has lost her looks,' remarked Mrs Bradshaw, the moment the young lady's back was turned, for she had never loved Dora, and by no means approved of the way in which her husband stared after her,

‘Humph!—don’t know that; uncommon nice handsome girl still,’ returned Conroy.

On hearing which confession of opinion, Mrs Bradshaw pulled a face and drew herself up a little, for she was a remarkably vain piece of the feminine creation, and thought, as some women do think, that any praise bestowed on another necessarily detracted from herself; wherefore because her husband did not agree with her that time had materially altered Dora, she felt she hated that unoffending individual even more than formerly, and would gladly have injured her if she could.

But Dora, happily unconscious of the nature of her feelings, returned, as has previously been recorded, to Ilpingden, with Miss Enstridge, who went and resided with her and her paralytic father, and was called on in due course by everybody in or about the village who was, as the phrase runs, ‘anybody.’

Amongst those who considered themselves the upper ten thousand of the place was a star of the first magnitude—Lady Traffles. People said, but then what will they not say, that being daughter to an official in some lunatic asylum, she had paid devoted attention to Sir John Traffles, Bart., during his temporary residence in that retreat, the result of which attentions was, that he thought fit (in a moment of mental aberration, his friends affirmed) to marry her. Be this as it may, Lady Traffles, a widow at forty, with a handsome jointure, no encumbrance, and some pretensions to beauty, was looked up to with unspeakable awe and reverence by many of the Ilpingden folks; and she, by way of return for their politeness and humility, looked down on the world at large, and the Ilpingden people in particular.

Dora by some means (it is impossible to determine exactly how) had contrived to excite the deadly antipathy of the baronet’s widow. She disliked young pretty faces, she detested people who were poor, she had no patience with persons who had ‘no position,’ and were not humble enough to drop down to the lowest depths, and submit to be trampled under foot by ‘nobility’ like herself—in brief, as Lady Traffles, fortunately or unfortunately as the circumstance may be considered, had no daughters to educate, the new-comer could be

of no use to her, and consequently she declared, when she heard of Dora's advent, that 'she considered such persons should be kept in their proper place,' and expressed her determination not to 'countenance,' directly or indirectly, any airs wherein the stranger might feel tempted to indulge.

Her park gates directly faced the church porch, and on Sunday mornings, just when the clergyman was commencing to read the *Te Deum*, for there was no choir capable of singing or howling anything excepting psalms, in Ilpingden, Lady Traffles, with a footman at her heels, might have been noted marching out of her estate, over the crossing leading to the sacred edifice, and finally up the aisle, preceded by the obsequious sexton, who humbly opened the door of the pew belonging to her ladyship, having reached which she slowly descended to her knees, much to the edification and delight of the little community, who were, as was perfectly right and natural, charmed and amazed to see so fine a lady attend Divine worship so regularly.

The Alanes, who were the grandest people in the neighbourhood as to birth, and connected with all the old families in the county, had a son, rector at Lidport, some three miles distant, and accordingly thither they drove, excepting on desperately wet Sundays, as did likewise all the young man's cousins, aunts, uncles, and so on to the remotest degree of consanguinity; for which reason Lady Traffles and Sir Peter Tomkins, of whom honourable mention has previously been made, were the only two aristocrats who went with any degree of regularity to hear Mr Imlach exhort his flock; they were in fact the only people worth speaking of who could in a general way be 'relied upon.'

Dora's home was some distance from the church; the service commenced at eleven o'clock; her father never breakfasted till ten: then she had to place the poor invalid in a chair by the window, and hurry to put on her bonnet—all which apparently trifling matters occupying a considerable portion of time, it came to pass, that on the first Sunday after her arrival in Ilpingden, she and Lady Traffles encountered each other at the crossing before mentioned.

The younger of the two gave way, to permit Lady Traffles to proceed: but that individual, to her intense surprise, drew



back, haughtily exclaiming, 'Just you go on, if you please!'

Though the tone and manner in which the words were spoken, implied that she ordered Dora before her, as she might a beggar child who was desirous of seeing whether her ladyship wore silk or cotton stockings, boots or shoes, the new comer concealed her annoyance; and bowing slightly in acknowledgment, as she would have done had the offer been made through courtesy instead of impertinence, she preceded the baronet's widow into the house of Him, before whom the prince and peasant are equal.

This being repeated on the following Sunday, the footman, as previously, stepping back a pace or two, to the end that he might smile in security, Dora determined to put a stop to the annoyance; for small as it might be, it still was an annoyance: and, therefore, when she could not contrive to reach the church before Lady Traffles, she either crossed before arriving at the park gates, or else entered a little later than her Ladyship.

Miss Enstridge came to Ilpingden on a Thursday evening; no one called on her that week—no one, in fact, knew of her arrival; and when, on the subsequent Sunday, she and Dora wended their way together to church, the latter forgot, whilst conversing with her companion, all about Lady Traffles, till she saw through the trees of the avenue that magnificent personage coming down the avenue, followed by her servant.

'Oh! there is Lady Traffles,' exclaimed Dora, turning very red. 'Let us cross to the other side.'

Now it chanced that the roads were very dirty (indeed, they were so on an average nine months out of the twelve at Ilpingden, and ankle deep in dust the other three), and moreover Miss Enstridge had on a pair of particularly nice boots, and stockings which for whiteness might have vied with newly-fallen snow; because of all which sufficient reasons she very naturally asked, before complying with Dora's somewhat unreasonable request—

'Why do you wish to avoid her?'

Feeling greatly provoked at having permitted the involuntary remark to escape her lips, Dora tried to make a jest of the matter, and repeated the circumstance with a forced smile; but Miss Enstridge perceiving the vexation it had



caused, and being justly angry at the insolence exhibited, said—

‘No, no, my dear, we will not cross or go out of our way one step to avoid her, and if possible I will see her ancles to-day;’ and the spinster walked resolutely on to the crossing, towards which her ladyship also sailed in the full glory and grandeur of her title, jointure, silks, velvets, gilt prayer-book with golden clasps, and so forth. Both paused as they met—each resolved to hold her ground and send the other on to church first—but Miss Enstridge had this one great advantage, that she calculated on opposition and was prepared for it, whilst her enemy anticipated none.

‘Just go on, if you please,’ said the latter.

‘Thank you,’ returned Miss Enstridge drily, ‘I prefer remaining where I am.’

The rebuff was so short and so completely unexpected that Lady Traffles was fairly put *hors de combat* by it; she looked down for a moment on her little wiry opponent, but there was a something in the malicious comical twinkle of the small keen gray eyes, and the quiet smile curling the thin lips, which made her decline bandying words with this unknown adversary; wherefore, without reply of any kind, she turned after an instant of hesitation and crossed the road.

Miss Enstridge permitted her to proceed about a couple of yards on her way, and then triumphantly followed, accompanied by Dora, the footman obsequiously bringing up the rear, thinking how admirably the little stranger, who picked her way so daintily over the pavement, had ‘done his mistress.’

He had been wont to grin at the manner in which Lady Traffles ordered Dora before her, but he now grinned twice as much at the sentence which sent her ladyship so speedily on her way, and he told the story that same afternoon with much *éclat* in the servants’ hall, to an admiring and delighted audience.

But whenever it became generally known who Miss Enstridge actually was, the amount of her income, and all the other particulars which contribute to stamp an individual as ‘respectable,’ the cottage was for some days literally besieged with visitors, Lady Traffles, with true Christian forgiveness, leading

the van; and as it soon became apparent, even to the comprehensions of the good people of Ilpingden, that to please the new comer it was necessary to treat Dora with politeness at least, if not with kindness, the latter speedily found her position pleasanter than it had ever previously been since her advent in the village.

What a wonderful thing money is; the most astonishing part of the affair being that, though people may not expect to derive any advantage, present or future, from the possessor of a handsome income, though they may never be asked into his house, never receive a shilling from him, though it is not in the remotest degree probable he will ever benefit them in any one way, still they bow down before and worship him; think a frown or a smile from him far more bitter or sweet than they would from one less abundantly gifted with this world's goods.

Surely it is no wonder people try to make money, for it can do almost anything—far should I be from saying it is the sole good in life, or ought to be considered as such, but any rational individual who has either seen or experienced the evils of poverty, must feel convinced there is no good in life without it. People affirm 'it cannot buy happiness'—possibly not—but most assuredly the want of it can bring misery and vexation unspeakable.

Miss Enstridge's reputed wealth—for rumour in this, as in most other cases, just doubled the amount of her actual income—accomplished a complete revolution in Dora's favour, amongst the nobodies and somebodies of Ilpingden.

The few young men it contained, under the impression that possibly she would leave Dora her money and soon die, or, at all events, settle something handsome upon her, discovered after the spinster's arrival, with a clear-sightedness only equalled by their previous blindness, that 'Miss Delorme was pretty and lady-like'—their mothers affectionately called her 'my dear,' and hoped she was not over-exerting herself; whilst Sir Peter Tomkins' six unmarried daughters began to regard with a very strong feeling of dislike the girl whom they had formerly looked upon merely with contemptuous disdain.

Dora still held her even way through them all, as she had been wont to do in the days of her first experience of village society; she was quietly, coldly polite, she accepted their

expressions of interest at their actual value and no more ; she declined their invitations, because had she even been able to leave her father, her pride would have revolted from the idea of visiting at the houses of persons who merely asked her because they thought such a mark of attention towards her favourite would gratify Miss Enstridge ; in vain that lady remonstrated, insisted, scolded, Dora remained resolutely, obstinately firm. ' Were she inclined to visit,' she said, ' she could not, for her father required her constant attendance, but she had no wish to go out. She did not like the people.'

Perhaps Miss Enstridge, though angry at her new friend for not instantly obeying her, inwardly respected the feeling which prevented Dora from complying. Persons who like but few of their fellow-creatures, are very violent in any attachments they do form, and consequently, though the spinster scolded Dora twenty times a day, it would almost have broken her really tender heart to have had to part from one whom she loved almost as fondly as if she had been her own daughter ; indeed, so much attached and interested in her did she become, that she commenced cogitating a plan for her worldly benefit, which she thought of for many days and nights, during all her moments of silence and solitude ; and whilst she is so engaged, we, patient reader, must turn back to the period when Dora and her father left Orpen, and knowing the events which have occurred during the interim to these pilgrims through the world, see how Mr Lesparde, whose means enabled him to perform his journey over the sands of time, not merely with ease, but with absolute pleasure, has passed a portion of his life since then.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

WHEN last we parted from him he was perusing an advertisement referring to the sale of Major Delorme's effects. As a general rule gentlemen do not rush to such auctions with the enthusiastic ardour which is too frequently evinced by some of the softer, though occasionally not much fairer, sex. Perhaps a reason for this might be found in the fact, that females having so little excitement in their lives seize with avidity every admissible opportunity which presents itself for spending a few hours away from their own firesides. To men the domestic circle is a pleasant change, a sort of quiet haven after the tumult and bustle of the day ;—to women any absence from it, for ever so brief a period, proves a welcome break in their usually monotonous existence.

Is not bidding at an auction a species of excitement similar to betting on a race-course ?

Is not presiding over a stall at a fancy fair or bazaar as much a kind of acting as ever was performed by an amateur in a theatrical company, for does not the lady in this case sink to the shopkeeper, or at least for a period assume the character ? and is not a lottery or a raffle a kind of gambling countenanced by society ? Then we have 'ladies' committees,' like gentlemen's 'boards of inquiry,'—'lady beggars,' who ask for pounds whilst their husbands open subscription lists, and jot down fifties, hundreds, and thousands. Ladies found infant schools and endow churches and build almshouses ; gentlemen give their names to hospitals, and join together in guilds and companies.

Everything in creation we know has its double, excepting a bank note, and why not the pursuits of the lords of the creation—why, as children mimic the employments and ape the manners of grown-up persons, should not the business-pleasures of women—if such a phrase be admissible—bear some sort of affinity, seem a sort of uncertain shadow, to the actual strife and occasional relaxations in which men are engaged and indulge. I know not why it should not be so, unless it be dangerous to make a mere pastime of more sober

employments, and render an amusement of duty; to commence serious undertakings without an apprenticeship so to speak, and to desert trades at which they are quite *au fait*, to jump at once into others of which they literally know nothing, where their power of doing harm must of necessity be great, whilst that of doing good is invariably small. But, pshaw! why wander from an auction-room to a dissertation concerning the 'excitements' which are permitted to women. Knowing how few there are, and how eagerly the fair creatures rush to them, it is by no means singular that you and I, reader, find ourselves in good company when we reach Major Delorme's abode, surrounded 'by all sorts and sizes' of ladies—young and old, rich, and only moderately endowed with this world's wealth, handsome, tolerably good-looking, and downright plain; by eyes of all colours, hair of all shades, voices soft and low, shrill and harsh.

A few deep bass voices may be heard, indeed, varying the feminine monotony, but the women are four times as numerous as the lords of the creation; and there they stand, bidding, wrangling, prying, examining, like fishwives, and custom-house searchers, and talking, arguing, and chattering, till the whole place can be compared to nothing save Babel, most assuredly not to a polite assemblage of educated Christian ladies, in a Christian country, in refined, self-esteeming England, in the middle, or even beginning, of the nineteenth century.

Ah! there at length is the person of whom we came in search, Mr Edmund Lesparde. How sweetly he smiles, how politely he bows and elbows his way through the crowd; what an example of urbanity and forbearance he sets to many of his bonneted acquaintances; and what a pity it is the lesson should be thrown away upon them; if they would only notice how gently he speaks, and modulate their voices a little, what an improvement it would be!

But what is he doing in such a place? It is not possible—it is not probable he is going to take a house and furnish it; or if he be, surely Edmund Lesparde would never dream of purchasing second-hand chairs, tables, and so forth; but what is he doing? Lady Nayton suggests the question, we can hear his reply.

He has come to secure a choice painting—one by some

famous artist, known by an impossible name, which a person gifted with a peculiarly constructed mouth might perhaps pronounce, but which no one, even though blest with the best of pens and thinnest of ink, could ever hope to commit correctly to paper.

The drawing-room furniture has been disposed of, the plate, the piano, everything almost, in fact, sold before the pictures are offered for competition.

Ladies who frequent auctions never purchase paintings, even if going 'bargains;' the glitter of a frame has no fascination for their matter-of-fact eyes, therefore the rooms are cleared of all save a few gentlemen when the auctioneer begins his harangue concerning 'this perfect gem of art.'

'Going, going, gone!' Yes, verily, to Mr Lesparde, who bids no more until the master of the ceremonies invites his attention to a miniature exquisitely painted, which he declares it would be 'a sin to sacrifice.'

No one else seeming inclined to pay a price for liberty to gaze at leisure on that lovely face, it also is knocked down to Mr Lesparde, who silently takes possession thereof.

And what did he want with the likeness of Dora's mother?

Really, I do not know: possibly, considering it to be, what it actually was, an admirably executed and valuable miniature of a very beautiful woman, he desired to look at it a little more attentively. It was never hung up in his room, however,—he was far too wise a man to commit such folly. Had he done so, people might have said he was engaged. He placed the production of the individual with the never-to-be-spelt name in a good light, but laid the miniature under a multiplicity of papers, in his desk; and in the course of another week, had almost forgotten its existence.

He had done with the Delormes; that last purchase closed his account and theirs; the five hundred was like a bad debt, 'irrevocable:' he had paid it cheerfully; he never repented him of his generosity; but when Mr Bradshaw, encountering him as he returned from the sale of the Major's effects, remarked, with characteristic delicacy and tact—'I say, Mr Lesparde, is this true what I hear, that you are the unfortunate person who signed your name to Delorme's bill, and had to pay it down, every farthing?' the old colonel's nephew,



feeling greatly nettled at the question, retorted, as Mr Bradshaw informed Major Delorme, in a very angry manner, 'That he wished the owner of Moorfield would confine his attention exclusively to his own business, or that of his friends, and interfere neither directly nor indirectly with the private affairs of him, Edmund Lesparde.'

Having received which agreeable piece of information, Mr Bradshaw sneaked sullenly away, rejoiced in his heart (always supposing he had one, and if not in whatever sort of contrivance it was that served him in lieu thereof) to think the 'confounded proud puppy had been "done" out of that amount, even though another equally disdainful man had pocketed it;' whilst Mr Lesparde contrived to get over the loss and banish it from memory almost instantaneously, and in a week after, returned with unabated pleasure to his previous mode of getting through life, a mode which it must be confessed had for a few days seemed to him somewhat insipid and unsatisfactory.

Rowing in the morning, riding, walking, or playing at billiards in the afternoon, dining at his own lodgings, or at the rooms or houses of some choice friends, then to the play, or ball, or amateur theatricals—Lady Nayton had a turn for these latter (perhaps because she was short and fat, and turned tragedy into comedy with delightful unconsciousness)—then he frequently joined the officers quartered in Orpen at supper, and usually reached home any time from four to six o'clock in the morning.

Thanks to long practice and that habit which is stated to become after a period second nature, he had taught himself the invaluable art of going to sleep at once, and, as he affirmed, made a better use of the few hours he devoted to rest than any other man in Orpen—not spending valuable time thinking about slumber and the incalculable advantages thereof, but falling at once into a state of glorious unconsciousness, from which, about nine or ten a.m., he awoke quite refreshed, ready to commence the same round again.

In brief this was his life from year's end to year's end, varied by occasional 'matches' at cricket, rackets, a flying visit to London, a run to Paris, and a month or two's sojourn on the Scotch moors during the autumn—pleasure always and ever—no imperative occupation—means, spirits, and health

to enjoy, after a fashion, the eternal whirl, out of which he never could really be said to exist.

For he had what is vulgarly termed 'a constitution like a horse,' though why, I may casually remark, that animal should have been selected by some lover of far-fetched similes as the type of strength, seeing it is about the most delicate creature in existence, is perfectly unintelligible to me; but he was very strong, he could endure twice as much fatigue as most men, he never was tired, seldom had the vapours, was always ready for anything, seemed to be able to do anything, undertake anything, think, act, feel anything, save always love.

Since Edmund Lesparde was a stripling; since he had come into his property and man's estate together; since he grew by right of years and weight of money and stability of position a person to be considered; since he had left 'The Oaks' and gone to Paris, and quitted Paris and gone over the whole continental tour, and finally quitted the continent and returned home, no one had ever known, or heard, or thought, or dreamed of Edmund Lesparde caring particularly for any one. The world had far too high an opinion of its petted darling, too much respect for the gifted, agreeable young man, to take the liberty, or even to think of taking the liberty, of adding to the above sentence the words 'save himself;' but the writer not being similarly prejudiced does so, and affirms further, that Edmund Lesparde was very fond of, and tolerant to, and proud of, that same perpetually-being-flattered, rather vain, careless, pleasure-seeking, beauty-admiring, kind if it did not annoy himself individually. Edmund Lesparde did love Edmund Lesparde, and no mortal man or woman perhaps besides: he was by no means incapable of caring for any one beyond the very narrow circle included in number one—only he had never done so yet, had never thought of doing so; he admired all the *le beau sexe*, that is, the pretty portion thereof; was polite by nature and education, and by inheritance, and on principle so to speak, to every creature who wore a petticoat, from Lady Nayton down to—whom shall I say?—the drunken sweep's heart-broken wife inclusive—every belle, blonde, brunette, mixture of both, fortune, genius, with whom he came in contact, he was attentive to, he conversed with; to sum up the

whole affair in eight short words, 'he appeared to like all, to love none.'

'Were he a woman-hater,' said Lady Nayton with a sigh, for Lady Nayton, though 'settled' herself, had a truly fashionable mania for 'settling' other people: 'were he a woman-hater there might be some hope of him, but as the case stands there is none, he will never marry, never;' and all Orpen and everybody who knew the old Colonel's nephew concurred in this opinion, and so did Edmund Lesparde himself, who at thirty decidedly intended to remain a light-hearted, much-sought-after bachelor for life.

Whenever a person obstinately and determinedly makes up his or her mind to anything, and feels convinced that nothing can ever have power to alter the idea thus formed, some circumstance is always sure to arise and level it with the dust. Even so it proved with Mr Lesparde, just when he had arrived at the conclusion above recorded, and determined never to marry, nor think twice about any 'mortal woman,' it being his unexpressed but still settled conviction that he should never meet any one sufficiently perfect to entitle her to the distinction of becoming 'Mrs Lesparde,' fate, in the person of her aunt, thought fit to bring Miss Durrant to spend a winter in Orpen, and by consequence threw that young lady across Mr Lesparde's anti-matrimonial vision.

Orpen was a very gay place; its population was not composed of a sufficient number of business men to permit commerce to supersede pleasure, and yet there was a staff of wealthy gentlemen merchants, that served the purpose of preventing pleasure stagnating for want of a perpetual underflow of money, and because of its being a gay place, where balls were held, and grandees lived, and the Upper Ten agreed to like, the Honourable Mrs Durrant, her daughters, niece, and son, selected that town as a particularly suitable place in which to spend the winter following Major Delorme's departure from the cottage.

It is scarcely necessary to go into a minute history of these people, or to inform the reader how it chanced that whilst the Misses Durrants (daughters) were provided with ample portions, Miss Durrant (niece) had no dowry, excepting her very beautiful face and figure, which were indeed (so many persons

affirmed) fortunes sufficient in themselves to satisfy any reasonable mortal.

Nature had done more, far more, than her part towards the niece, but neglected the daughters; man had made up for their personal deficiencies by bestowing upon them that universal beautifier, a well-filled purse; and thinking possibly that Miss Durrant's gifts were numerous enough and various enough already, failed to set her in the golden frame which was deemed, and justly so, necessary to enhance the very few attractions of her cousins.

The widow and her *protégée* had one great art not generally possessed by most people, although popular opinion has declared it quite essential to any uncommon success in life: namely, that of telling every circumstance redounding to their credit, and not a single one, which could even remotely militate against it; wherefore it was never suspected by the good inhabitants of Orpen that Miss Durrant had in succession flirted with half the beaux who congregate at watering-places; that she had at one time, to use a common though very expressive phrase, 'fallen between two stools,' *i. e.*, having somewhat injudiciously endeavoured to keep two lovers till she could positively ascertain which one would be the best match, she had unhappily lost both: that, in short, she was resolved to secure a wealthy husband ere her perishable and uncertain fortune vanished, and had for that sole purpose accompanied her aunt and cousins to the gay little county town of Orpen.

Her beauty was something dazzling to contemplate; no one could have passed her in the streets without feeling that something lovely, beyond what is generally to be met, had floated by: there was never seen so graceful an equestrian; no Englishwoman, it was affirmed, had ever previously glided so lightly through the mazes of the fairy dance: she had a voice so soft, so low, so tender, so musical, that it would have shamed the sweetest tones which ever escaped the lips of mermaids; there was 'no one like Miss Durrant in England—no one like Miss Durrant, many persons believed, in the world.'

And indeed she was gloriously handsome; her eyes were large, dark, soft, liquid, there was almost nothing those orbs were incapable of expressing, whilst there was nothing her

long silky lashes were incapable of concealing; the thick braids of her rich hair were a miracle to behold, so was the perfect chiseling of her small delicate features; her figure, too, was a faultless companion to such a face, and she was witty, graceful, fascinating, clever; had read much, observed more, was capable of fathoming the characters and thoughts of those with whom she came in contact; competent to converse fluently on most subjects with any one; in fact, so far as accomplishments, beauty, talent, and manner can make an individual 'perfect,' Agatha Durrant unquestionably was that utterly impossible creature.

Edmund Lesparde was precisely the sort of man to be smitten with her beauty and rivetted by it; she spell-bound him; from the first time he looked upon her he felt that here at length was one worthy in every way to become his wife; and it seemed as if the affection were mutual, for although in the ball-room, and the promenade, in her aunt's carriage—everywhere Miss Durrant was perpetually surrounded by admirers, still the one on whom she smiled most graciously, to whom she conversed most pleasantly, was Mr Lesparde, the richest commoner in or about Orpen. He was constantly by her side, he thought life, in short, a blank when she was not near him; her unmistakable preference flattered his vanity, and he was too vain, too much enamoured, to attribute this preference to worldly motives; it gratified him to think that she whom he loved was admired by all, sought by many, and yet that he alone, out of numerous competitors, should, because of his own great merits, win the prize.

Agatha Durrant was capable of loving nothing on earth, excepting so far as it was useful to her; she was a vain, calculating, sordid, clever, selfish, unprincipled woman, fond of adulation and gratified by it, even whilst in her heart (if she had one) she despised those who flattered her.

Love, gratitude, friendship, generosity, affection, were words she had heard spoken indeed, and words she could utter fluently enough herself, but she attached no good or noble meaning to them; they possessed no more interest for her than that derivable from being the names of passions and feelings existing in the breasts of foolish romantic persons, upon which she could skilfully play, and so influence those with whom she chanced to be thrown



to aid her directly or indirectly in her grand project, viz., that of obtaining a good settlement in life, a solid position in the world.

When first she had started in the round of fashionable dissipation, some absurd and romantic ideas of dukes captivated by her beauty offering their hearts, and, what was of infinitely more importance, their coronets, to her, fled through Agatha's brain, but these very youthful visions being now completely dispelled, the more she reflected the more apparent it became unto her she had better secure Mr Lesparde, though he was not a duke, a lord, or even a plain baronet; and although his income, handsome as it undoubtedly was, did not reach nearly to the sum she had in earlier years settled on, as needful to make the appearance she desired in the world.

For some time, therefore, she appeared in public, surrounded by admirers of all ranks and degrees, dancing with this one, conversing with that one, smiling kindly and graciously on all, yet still welcoming Mr Lesparde ever and always with her brightest look, reserving for him the choicest sparkle of her wit, and those deeper tones of feeling and sentiment she knew, unhappily, so well how to assume.

And he was won! He had no senses left; he who had never previously cared for aught of woman born, was blind, deaf, dumb to all but her.

She had dazzled him; he had hovered like a moth round the blaze, unconscious—or more probably regardless—of the danger he incurred by venturing so near, was scorched, and finally lay prostrate and helpless at her feet.

Then Miss Durrant came modestly forth as the engaged bride of Mr Lesparde, and many envied her, and numbers hated him, and he was inexpressibly happy, and she was almost contented, and presents poured in from her intended husband. If he could have spent a fortune to gain a smile from her, to give her an instant's gratification, he would have done it. She was fond of jewellery, therefore rings, chains, brooches, bracelets, rained upon her like fairy gifts, and she prized them, for their ideal and sentimental value little, but for their intrinsic worth much: and stood in the solitude of her dressing-room alone with her own conscience, calculating the cost of each



fresh token of attachment which affection had unquestionably sent, though gold might, indeed, have purchased.

She was going to marry him for the love of what he had; he was about to wed her for the love of what he erroneously fancied she was; and yet, infatuated though he might be, once or twice after he had proposed and was accepted, a sort of vague, undefined doubt—a kind of strange uncomfortable distrust did occasionally pass across his mind, and cloud his felicity; it was only for a moment, however, that reason thus feebly triumphed over affection; she merely came forth at rare intervals to prove that she was not wholly dead, but then again was hushed to slumber by the soft low tones of the syren's voice, by the poetry of her language, by what those who did not know of her real nature, termed the 'romance' of her large dreamy eyes.

Time passed on—oh! rapidly it sped: for days appear but minutes to the happy. Winter sullenly departed, and Spring followed in his footsteps; and Summer, brilliant summer, came; and in September, Edmund Lesparde and Agatha Durrant were to become man and wife. Letters accumulated on his table he could not answer—he could scarcely read them: what were letters to him! what was anything on earth to the heart of the once selfish man—save her, the idol of his soul; the bodily impersonation of all his wildest youthful dreams of beauty—Agatha Durrant!

August came; the sun was shining cheerily into Mr Lesparde's apartment; he was hurrying over his breakfast, longing for the hour to arrive at which he could call on his betrothed, when his servant informed him a gentleman was desirous of an interview.

'Ask him to walk in,' said his master: and forthwith a thin, shallow, dull-eyed, impenetrable individual stalked into the room, and taking a chair directly opposite Mr Lesparde, opened his business and his mouth, as follows:

'I believe I have the honour of addressing Mr Edmund Lesparde.'

'I am that person,' replied the other.

'Nephew to the late Colonel Henry Lesparde, who formerly resided at "The Oaks,"' pursued the visitor.

‘The same,’ was Mr Lesparde’s reply.

‘To whom Major Arthur Auguste Delorme is indebted to the amount of five hundred pounds sterling,’ continued the other.

‘Really—’ commenced Mr Lesparde, but his visitor stopped him with—

‘Excuse me, sir, for one moment. That sum I am instructed to repay: if, therefore, you will favour me with an acknowledgment I shall have much pleasure in returning you the principal, together with interest for one year at five per cent. per annum; and best thanks for the loan, and the generous and gentlemanly manner in which you took up that unfortunate bill.’

If a thunderbolt had fallen at Edmund Lesparde’s feet he could not have felt more confounded than when he heard the above speech; he looked in doubt and amazement at his visitor, as if he believed the whole thing to be either a very bad joke or an entire delusion, until the stranger taking out a pocket-book commenced counting down notes to the required amount; then he found words to express surprise, to decline the proffered payment.

‘He had never expected a return of any kind,’ he said, ‘he had dismissed the circumstance entirely from his recollection; five hundred pounds was a matter of no consequence to him; he had hoped Major Delorme would not object to remain under so slight, so very slight, an obligation; he did not require money; he really must refuse to accept it.’

‘My instructions are clear and unmistakeable,’ responded the visitor; ‘I am not a principal in this matter, merely an agent; my orders are to pay you five hundred and twenty-five pounds sterling, for which amount I am to receive a proper receipt; may I beg you now to give me that document, for I have no time to lose. Possibly when he left Orpen Major Delorme never expected that the sum could be repaid to you; I am happy to be the humble means of conveying it to your hands.’

‘But—’ began Mr Lesparde.

‘My instructions were to take no refusal, to listen to no remonstrances,’ interposed the other. ‘The debt is clearly owing; allow me to discharge it; you need feel no scruple

about receiving this amount—it is yours. When once you give me the receipt I have done with the matter; you may destroy these notes then, and I shall feel perfectly satisfied to see you doing as you choose with your own property; but meantime they are a trust in my hands and a burden to me. May I beg you to give me an acknowledgment.'

And almost before the ink of the required document was dry, the stranger and it had disappeared together as suddenly as the former had entered the apartment, and but for the pile of notes lying on the table Edmund Lesparde would have imagined the whole thing to be a dream, and the grim gaunt man one of the shadowy phantoms of it.

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### CHAPTER XXX.

MR EDMUND LESPARDE absolutely devoted a few minutes of his valuable time to the consideration of Major Delorme's affairs, and the conclusion at which he naturally arrived being that the *ci-devant* officer had jumped by some means or other into a fortune, he put aside the money without much hesitation, and thought that after all he had done Delorme injustice, for that this memory of a debt and liquidation of it evinced a much honester principle than he had fancied formed any ingredient in the Major's character. And pretty Dora too—yes, this circumstance augured well for her present and future happiness; he was glad of it for her sake—very glad; and much pleased altogether he went to the Honourable Mrs Durrant's, where he saw not merely his 'ladye love,' but also a raw, silly young lieutenant, without a single particle of sense or cleverness, who nevertheless had been considered ever since his arrival at Orpen, a few days before, a personage of immense importance, inasmuch as he was son and heir of the rich Lord Bixley, and the natives of Orpen, who had an immense respect for titles and guineas, bowed down before and worshipped the inane youth accordingly.

Mr Lesparde was by no means of a jealous disposition, but he was a rational being, and it was impossible for him to avoid observing that although Miss Durrant was engaged to him, she did not altogether discourage the decided attentions of the foolish boy, who had at first sight, as boys will do, fallen over head and ears in love with a woman some six or seven summers his senior in years, and at least fifty times older than himself in knowledge of the world, in sense, in craft, and artifice.

Almost sullenly Mr Lesparde returned home; he did not altogether like this; for though Miss Durrant was very beautiful, and had no doubt from her childhood been accustomed to admiration and homage, still he could not approve of her smiling so pleasantly on the absurd attachment of a young sprig of nobility; but 'nonsense!' exclaimed the old Colonel's nephew, as he flung himself into an easy-chair in his own room: 'is it, can it be possible that I am absolutely making myself uncomfortable about the attentions of that boy; love without faith and trust is nothing, a mere name, a sham, and so I will believe her perfect, and myself a suspicious idiot,' and acting on this determination, he tried to smile at the feelings which would still agitate his mind, and strove with all his heart to quiet them into rest, and as Miss Durrant in a few days became either tired of the young lieutenant's compliments, or else more prudent, Mr Lesparde willingly believed his former opinion of her had been correct, and that in very truth, and thought, and deed, she was perfect.

It was just about at this period, when the term of his liberty was drawing to a close, that he encountered Mr Conroy Bradshaw, as the latter individual chanced to be crossing the threshold of the bank, at the moment when Mr Lesparde was emerging from it.

'Good morning, sir,' exclaimed Conroy, as if they had been sworn friends during the previous term of their natural lives, 'very happy to see you.'

'Good morning,' responded the other, somewhat icily.

'Just returned from London,' burst forth Mr Bradshaw, 'met an old friend—faith *two* friends I believe of yours there; lodged in the same house with them; asking after you;' and the owner of Moorfield, who was on the eve of bringing home

a new mistress to the 'old place,' fixed a penetrating eye on Edmund to see 'how he took it.'

'Indeed,' returned that gentleman, with, if possible, an increase of frigidity.

'Oh! I see you don't know whom I mean—Delorme and his daughter; pretty girl, but not so pretty as formerly, asking after you very politely. I told them all the news about you, and—and they were very glad to hear you were well and about to be happily married.'

'Greatly obliged, I am sure,' said Mr Lesparde, walking past the unoffendable Conroy; but as it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps Mr Bradshaw could throw some light on the to him unintelligible state of the Major's affairs, he abruptly turned and detaining the owner of Moorfield for a moment, demanded:

'Can you tell me if Delorme be comfortably off at present?'

'How should I know?' returned Conroy, much surprised, and not exactly certain what reply he ought to give, 'he did not enter into a detail of his affairs with me; but I have reason to believe Miss Delorme——'

'What of her?' inquired Mr Lesparde, eagerly, as the other paused.

'Oh! nothing particular, I thought you were engaged to be married.'

'And if I am, what then?' retorted Mr Lesparde.

'Why, there is a good old rhyme, you know,' rejoined Conroy, with a sneer, 'which says:

“'Tis well to be merry and wise;  
'Tis well to be honest and true;  
Tis well to be off with an old love,  
Before you get on with the *new*.”'

Something very like 'Confound your impudence,' escaped the lips of the individual to whom the above friendly piece of advice was addressed; but the sound of Mr Bradshaw's short, grating laugh, left him almost without the power of replying; whilst the other, rejoiced at having for once 'got the last and best word with a swell,' marched triumphantly into the bank, whither Edmund did not follow him to demand an ex-

planation, or compel him to recant his implied accusation of a former, still lingering, regard for Dora — pretty Dora Delorme.

Mr Lesparde felt wonderfully ruffled by this little incident : he did hate and despise Conroy Bradshaw in his heart ; and that a man like this should have had the ability to annoy him, irritated him even more than the annoyance itself. ‘ If ever I speak to the fellow again,’ he murmured, ‘ I will give him leave to insult me ; and yet, after all, it was my own fault ; what are the Delormes to me, that I should ask information concerning their domestic affairs from such a fellow ? I wish I had not spoken to him ;’ but this wish being now perfectly incapable of fulfilment, he contented himself with resolutions of greater prudence for the future : and so returned home to look over some law papers, and think about his approaching marriage, and his bride.

The more he reflected concerning the two latter, the higher his spirits rose : he felt like a racer, who, having distanced all competitors, sees the goal and the prize in sight at length ; and yet the comparison is not altogether just ; it would apply better to Miss Durrant, for though Mr Lesparde was not so rich as that lady could have desired, still it was quite as a ‘ prize,’ most certainly not as a lover, she regarded the man destined, if nothing unforeseen occurred, to become, ere long, her husband.

Mr Edmund Lesparde had his natural faults, and many an acquired one besides ; but he was possessed of strong, good feelings, though they were uncommonly difficult to find, and still more difficult to arouse ; and he would have resisted the blaze of Agatha Durrant’s beauty, could he for one moment have imagined, that so many of Nature’s best gifts had been lavished on a creature formed without one noble, elevating thought—one generous, unselfish impulse.

As he tossed over the letters lying in his drawer, a face—a sweet, placid, though by no means strikingly handsome face, met his view ; he took it up—it was Mrs Delorme’s portrait, which had lain there forgotten for months.

At first he gazed coldly and unadmiringly upon it—for with the memory of Agatha Durrant’s countenance before him, all



other charms sunk into utter insignificance, but as by degrees his looks became intently rivetted on the miniature, new beauties seemed each minute to arise on the ivory, and shine forth from it.

A disagreeable feeling struck to his heart as he gazed, which, if expressed in words, would have sounded strangely in his ears: 'What is there in this face which is wanting in that of my affianced wife?'

Had he read the reply of those mild, calm eyes aright he would have found they answered, 'Truth.'

What a fascination there is about a portrait, it appears to speak to our souls, to frown, to smile, to be quiet, to be moved, as the mood is upon us; and so Mr Lesparde sat and gazed at the miniature, and thought how that fair woman had passed from earth like the shadow of a dream.

How sad it is to gaze on the painted features of the dead, to think they once dwelt amongst us, talked to us, smiled upon us, that their tears flowed with ours, that their clear ringing laughter made music in our homes—that their loved voices carried consolation and happiness to our hearts; that look answered look, and lips pressed lips; that their sorrows were our griefs, and our pleasures their joys; and now, though the earth seems lonely without them, though the skies have lost a portion of their brightness, and the sunshine has departed from the hills, and the flowers' perfume is not so sweet, and the songs of the birds sound not so harmonious, as in the days ere they went home to heaven; though life is almost purposeless, and hope knows no realization of its once exultant visions can ever be on this side the grave; still, and in spite of all these things, the daily round of business and pleasure, the perpetual monotony of existence, with its never ending, always beginning course of talking, walking, thinking, sleeping, eating, and drinking, goes on just the same as ever, and even whilst we fervently and sincerely mourn, we discover, and own with a sigh, that we can live, ay, and perhaps enjoy life a little too, even though they, the dear old friends and relatives of former times, the loved, the trusted, the lamented, the tried, travel beside us no longer, may never greet us more.

And yet the painted features of the dead, copied during life

by the hand of one who it may be is sleeping too, remain with us, and will remain on earth long after we also have joined those who reluctantly preceded us into the 'silent land.'

Mr Lesparde was not much in the habit of indulging in sentimental reveries, yet some such thoughts as these passed through his mind as he looked at the face, and then another memory which had long been partially slumbering was revived, and he began to marvel where the girl might be who had sat in that very room, and spoken so earnestly yet so strangely to him, and who had roused feelings the existence of which had been previously unsuspected by himself—who had touched chords in his breast that had never before vibrated to living finger.

Where was she now, that child whom he once had comforted, that girl whom he had saved from sorrow, who had loved her father so devotedly, who had pleaded so powerfully and effectually both for him and herself? did she like residing amongst streets and bricks and mortar—she who had lived for eighteen years in the midst of trees, and fields, and flowers, and had said—oh! little dreaming how soon she should have to leave that home behind her—that 'she would not quit the cottage for the world?'

They must be well off now as to pecuniary matters; but was she happy, had the world changed her heart, had society altered her simple, trustful nature? Mr Bradshaw had said she was not so pretty as formerly—might not one short year have taken some of the loveliness from her soul as well as from her countenance? and what was it that the owner of Moorfield knew and had been going to tell him about her? Pshaw! what were the Delormes or Mr Bradshaw to him? not much certainly! little drops in the broad ocean of society which surrounded him. Why, he had wasted the entire evening looking at the picture of a dead woman: he must go and dress for Lady Nayton's musical party, where he was to meet all the fashionable people of Orpen, and that priceless pearl among women—Agatha Durrant; but even whilst he was replacing the miniature, preparatory to adjourning to his intended self-adornment, the door of the room opened, and Mr Champion, unannounced and unaccompanied, walked in.

‘I want to talk to you,’ he said; ‘you are not busy, I hope.’

‘Well, not particularly,’ responded Mr Lesparde. ‘I am engaged to go to Lady Nayton’s indeed; but I have always a spare half-hour for you whenever you come; pray be seated.’

‘I knew your uncle,’ commenced Mr Champion abruptly, ‘and your father, and your mother, before you were born. I have always liked, respected, esteemed you: may I now take an old friend’s privilege and speak to you as if I were a parent, or a brother.’

‘What is it?’ demanded Mr Lesparde, a vague sort of undefined dread, a kind of uncertain horror, oppressing him.

‘You will promise not to be offended?’

‘Offended with you?’ exclaimed Edmund, ‘was I ever offended? even when you told me I was wasting my life—frittering away my existence, was I offended then? when you reproved my careless, pleasan mode of getting through the world; even when I felt the reproof, bitter as it was, to be doubly so because of its truth; angry or impatient with you I never was, why should I be so now?’

‘Because *then* I merely wounded your own self-love, *now* I come to speak, not of a selfish attachment, but of one which is as generous and honest, as it is misplaced.’

‘Not of her—not of her,’ cried Edmund, almost imploringly, as he arose and stood opposite Mr Champion, ‘say of *me* anything, but nothing of her,—nothing.’

‘You purpose throwing yourself away on a woman, as you formerly did on the world,’ replied Mr Champion, ‘but the world I felt would never be a tie to you for life; if you marry her you cannot break the bond; wherefore, in all friendship, with true interest, in bitter sorrow, I have come, Edmund Lesparde, to tell you she is utterly unworthy of you: that you must break off this match, that you must tear the veil from your eyes and see her as I see her, as others see her, as many know her, as you will when it is too late, unless you listen to my warning voice, and break, ere the time for rescue has past for ever, the engagement which unhappily binds you to a woman heartless as she is beautiful, false as she is fair, calculating as she is clever, worthless as she is fascinating.’

‘You must not speak so of her; if she were my wife, no man would dare to utter such words in my presence; she is not less dear to me because we are not yet married. I cannot listen to this; you must speak no more of her.’

‘Less dear to you she may not be,’ said Mr Champion, unheeding the vehement tone of command in which the last few words were spoken, ‘less dear to you she may not be, but less near, thank God, unquestionably she is; only hear me, it is all I ask; then, if you will—never grasp my hand in friendship again, pass me in the street, turn away your head when you encounter your father’s friend, your true adviser. Only hear me; when I have spoken, I shall feel I have done my duty, and go home with a sad heart but a quiet conscience.’

‘Go home now,’ said Mr Lesparde, in a choking voice; ‘I want to know nothing, to hear nothing, to—’

‘You shall know much ere I leave this room,’ interposed the other, firmly: ‘then judge for yourself—act for yourself: I do not fear the result. Sit down’—and pushing the young man gently into a seat, he rapidly gave him such a detail of the lady’s previous life, and attempted ‘settlements,’ together with so succinct a history of her family, and the character of the different individuals composing it, that Edmund, fairly overwhelmed, sat pale, and quiet, and mute, till Mr Champion, concluding with the words,

‘Now, I *know* all this to be true;’ his auditor vehemently exclaimed,

‘I do not believe one syllable of the story; it is false first and last—I do not believe it!’

‘I do not ask you to believe it,’ retorted Mr Champion. ‘I did not till this morning, though I heard it days since. I only ask you to watch—to be on your guard; to exercise your judgment: Heaven guide you to a correct one on the subject—good night;’ and the banker held out a hand to his friend, which the latter sullenly declined.

A flush came over Mr Champion’s face; it was one of anger and pain, but it lasted only for a moment.

‘Well, be it so,’ he said, after an instant of reflection; well, be it so! I do not blame you for loving her better than me—for more readily imagining me to be false than her to be deceitful; for believing me to be mistaken sooner than her

untrue: time, unhappily, will show you how sadly correct my assertions have been; and then I know you will forgive an old staunch friend, for having possessed the love and courage necessary to enable him to perform a painful duty; to warn you of the nature and extent of the danger on which you are heedlessly rushing. When reason has triumphed over love, then you will not refuse to take the proffered hand of one who is grieved beyond what words can tell, thus to have pained you.'

Without another syllable he departed, leaving Edmund alone with his own bitter reflections; for a few minutes he remained, his head buried in his hands, a hundred agonizing thoughts, and old suspicions, and tormenting ideas, distracting him.

Then a strange feeling of sickness and giddiness oppressing him, he arose and dressed, and went to the party to seek comfort, and pleasure, and assurance—where he was destined never again to find it—in the society of the loveliest woman in England, Agatha Durrant.

It was, as has already been said, a musical assemblage, which Lady Nayton held on the evening in question: that is, she invited a certain number of guests to her house, and every one who could play or sing—as in duty bound, played and sang;—whilst everybody else did all which lay in their power to drown the sound of the instruments and the voices of the performers, by perpetually chattering and keeping up an incessant buzz of conversation.

Truly it is as curious a way of listening to music and enjoying the harmony of sweet tones as ever mortal heard of, and yet the talkers, invariably to be met with at a *soirée musicale*, would feel mightily offended, if the excellence of their taste and the correctness of their ears were impugned even by a doubt.

Mr Lesparde's arrival had been delayed for such a period by various circumstances, of which the reader is already cognizant, that when he reached Lady Nayton's the rooms were already full, and every chord in his frame being out of tune, a trifling occurrence seemed a confirmation of his worst fears—set every pulse of his heart throbbing, every nerve in his body quivering.



Glancing through the open door to the end of another apartment, he saw Agatha, smiling sweetly on the young lieutenant, who the next moment conducted her towards the piano, and remained standing by her side whilst she sang.

And oh! how she did sing! how the liquid tones of her mellow flexible voice moved one or two in that assemblage—what gushes of melody she could pour forth, how the cadences rose and fell, and died away—what soul, and sense, and feeling she contrived to throw into the strain, how accomplished, and tender, and sympathetic she appeared, and yet how hollow, and insincere, and artificial she was.

Mr Lesparde glided silently behind the crowd, and standing in the embrasure of a window, quietly watched the scene: he had thought of going home, but then resolved to sit the play out, to see all was to be seen, to learn his fate as quickly and as speedily as possible.

Whilst he remained thus listening to the tones of that still dear and dangerously captivating voice, the conversation of two strangers close at hand fell on his ear.

‘Who is he?’ inquired one, as if continuing a dialogue, some portion of which had escaped Mr Lesparde; ‘who is he?’

‘Oh! he is the son and, what is more to the point, will be heir of Lord Bixley. ’Twould be a simple act of charity to tell his father what is going on, for he is very young and silly, and seems to be deeply smitten.’

‘What a pity she is engaged—is she not so?’ demanded the first speaker.

‘Yes, undoubtedly; but if all I have heard be true she would not mind that if she saw a favourable opening in a richer quarter,’ was the response. ‘What a fool that Lesparde must be to be sure.’

The arms of the person thus politely referred to were folded across his chest, and he pressed them hard against it to still the beating of his heart: the blood rushed like fire through his veins—for a moment the floor seemed unsteady beneath his feet, but then came perfect stillness, perfect calm; the tempest had expended its fury in a storm of contending passions, emotions, affections; then ensued a lull—he was once again capable of thinking and reasoning.



Had he been deceived, could Mr Champion and the vague whisperings of his own sense have been right, and his trust and feelings wrong, what was there about Miss Durrant which made these men speak so lightly of her? He *would* watch: if she were worthy the love of any honourable man he would marry her, but if she were not he would, beautiful though she might be, break off the engagement, at all risks, careless of her, of himself, regardless of the world's censure, of the world's opinion.

And having arrived at this determination, he emerged from the window, and after sauntering carelessly about the room, interchanging words at every step with some acquaintance, he drew close to the pair, who were now, Miss Durrant's performance, or, to speak more correctly, vocal exhibition, being finished, chatting pleasantly together. What was she saying? oh! merely talking a little sentiment, speaking the same words that once had charmed Mr Lesparde, in the same soft thrilling tones; but the scales having fallen from the eyes of the latter, he could now face her beauty and not be blinded by it. Like the woman in the fairy tale, who touched one orb with some of the liquid out of the spirits' cauldron, he now beheld deformity instead of loveliness; this priceless pearl turned out to be but a very worthless stone after all.

He spoke to her, and as she started, exclaiming, 'You are so late, I thought you were not coming,' the blood rushed up into her cheek, but it was not the glow of pleasure which made her look for a moment so exquisitely beautiful; it was the fear of premature detection, of having gone too far, that brought the rich flush into her face: could he possibly have overheard any portion of the conversation; her eyes sought his for information, but then sunk again, for she read, or imagined she read, in the stern gaze which for a moment was fastened upon her, that he had divined her character at last, that he had looked behind the mask to see her for once as she really was, a calculating woman in search of a rich titled husband.

Mr Lesparde was not the man, however, to permit others to say he was jealous; he evinced by no outward sign anger, doubt, suspicion—so perfectly calm and contented did he appear, indeed, that Miss Durrant, believing she had been mistaken, and that he was so blindly devoted to her as to be incapable of

seeing a single fault, forgot her fears, and soon, in the triumph of her beauty and the consciousness of talent, began to play off one lover against another, whilst Mr Lesparde, proud and far-seeing, reading down into the depths of her soul, perceived the coldness, and coquetry, and heartlessness, which alone lay beneath so much grace, and sparkle, and loveliness, and before the evening had concluded his resolution was taken.

He saw her to her aunt's carriage—with one hand she pressed his at parting, whilst with the other she received, unsuspectedly—so she fancied—a bouquet of flowers from Lord Bixley's heir: but Mr Lesparde beheld it all, and smiled bitterly as he did so—he would give any money to be quit of her—enough to make her independent for life.

As he had unhappily offered to marry her, he would consider the whole matter from the same point of view as that from whence—now it was too late—he saw plainly she had done; she had regarded the affair as one of the purse not of the heart—well, he would give her so much and cancel the engagement, just as he might give a certain sum to an individual from whom he had agreed to purchase a thousand acres of land, which had turned out a worse bargain than he anticipated—in fact, a bargain of which it was desirable to get rid at any pecuniary loss.

He would never marry; his previous determination had been right, his later infatuation wrong. All women were alike; creatures to be admired perhaps, but on whom it was worse than useless to bestow a second thought: he would never marry; he would return to his old life, for it had been a pleasant one enough, spite of all Mr Champion affirmed relative to its being a comparatively useless one. What object had he formerly in existence but to get through it? What object had he now? none; oh! no—no, none, for she whom he had loved he despised, the light had departed from his heart; there was a bitter gnawing pain where so much affection had lately dwelt—he would return to his old life again; had he been happier since he had partially relinquished it for her? He put his hand to his forehead as he asked himself the question, and felt that as for him the one great employment of existence, from thenceforward, would be solely to kill time, he should not greatly regret if time with him had ceased to be for ever.

The next day he called at the Honourable Mrs Durrant's. Miss Agatha Durrant had a headache, and was confined to her own room, and the succeeding one found her still indisposed, and so on for two or three days more, when the news suddenly spread through Orpen that she had eloped with Lord Bixley's son, and that Lesparde—poor fellow—was jilted.

And that unfortunate individual meeting Mr Champion, wrung his friend's hand silently, whilst the other, in all sincerity, though looking sadly in the young man's troubled face, said :

' You are well out of a bad business; with a very sorrowful heart, Edmund, I wish you joy.'

It was more than any one ever did her young husband, who in after days frequently repented him of his folly; the presents Mr Lesparde had given her were never returned; she wore them for years afterwards, and told all her relations they were family jewels re-set.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

WE left Miss Enstridge planning a resolution, the result of which she revealed one winter's morning to her young friend in the following words :

' Dora, child, I am going from home.'

' Indeed!' exclaimed Dora; ' for long? '

' No: only for a few days; and I hope you will take care of yourself and the house, and your father, and so forth, during my absence, and remember to direct the *Times* regularly to Frederick, and—and kiss me, child, and don't catch cold, or do anything foolish till I come back; ' having concluded which exhortation without further explanation, Miss Enstridge, together with a very trifling display of luggage, set forth on her journey.

It was to Lancashire, all the way: not to Liverpool, the

home of her youth : not to the residences of old friends, not to the abodes of relations : but to the palace of a very cross old man, whose temper time had not mended ; who grew more infirm in body and more obstinately savage in disposition as days and months, and weeks and years, crawled drearily along.

How many summer suns had shone upon that place since Frances Enstridge last gazed upon it ; how often had spring flowers blossomed and April showers fallen, and June's roses withered, and August's gorgeous beauty faded, and autumn leaves fallen, and winter's snows hung on the evergreens, since then !

Oh ! there is a ceaselessly returning spring for everything save the human heart : the flowers of the garden bloom and fade, bloom and fade, season after season, while the hopes of our youth live but for a brief space, then die for ever ; for those beautiful apparently transitory plants there seems a perpetual existence, a perpetual decay ; autumn skies see them perishing ; a new year finds them lovely as ever ; but for us there is only one spring, one summer, one autumn, one winter : happy he who departs ere the snows of age have fallen on his head ; and happy, thrice happy, he whose heart they never touch, who returns the gift to his Maker fresh, and pure, and green, fit to blossom in Eternity, as it never bloomed in the cold ungenial atmosphere of this sordid earth of ours. How few of the buds of youth expand in manhood, bear fruit in riper age ; how rarely visions of spring-time are found to be realized when the winter of existence arrives. Oh ! life is a long wish and a longer disappointment ; a bright delusion for a period ; a stern sorrow ever after : blessed are they who look for the fulfilment of their expectations, not here, but hereafter ; who, fixing their steadfast gaze beyond that finish of earthly desires, the grave, look for the accomplishment of a higher and surer hope in that better land where sorrow entereth not ; where sin hath no abiding-place ; where disappointment is unknown.

Some such thoughts as these passed through the spinster's mind as she approached that 'Palace,' from whence, since last she had visited it, a coffin had been carried, a bride departed, a daughter banished.

Time had made fearful gaps in her heart since she, a girl, turned her from that place, thinking bitterly of the skeleton it contained. Summer flowers decked the gardens then, and an unclouded sky made all beneath it look like paradise; but the snow was on the ground now, and winter's clouds looming above, threw a shadow over the 'palace,' chilling the bosoms of its inhabitants and those who approached it.

And there had come a winter to the heart of Frances Enstridge also, for youth and beauty had departed, and relatives had died, and friends become cold, and the air castles of those days had been dispelled by the mighty touch of that ruthless destroyer, Experience, and no hope of earlier years had been fulfilled, and she who had in former times wandered over those grounds, across those lawns, through those gardens, a girl, with pretty Selina Zuriel, had now come back a lonely old maid, to plead the cause of his dead daughter's child to the proud possessor of all this magnificence—childless, lonely, desolate John Zuriel, of Stor Court.

In compliment to the petticoats she wore, albeit they were of the very shortest, Miss Enstridge was ushered into a large comfortless drawing-room, which somehow only seemed colder because of the fire at which no living creature, not even a dog, was warming himself. What a dreary place an untenanted house appears; but it is not more dreary than a handsome well-furnished room, which looks as if human joys never entered it, as if woman's presence never graced it, as if children's sports never disarranged it, as if no one ever thought of remaining in it—the spinster felt that the whole place was very comfortless, and her opinion did not undergo any modification when the master of the apartment came slowly in to speak with his lady visitor.

Years had laid heavy hands on him—whitened his hair, furrowed his brow, pinched his cheek, bent his head, contracted his shoulders, bowed his figure, weakened his limbs, fettered his steps—time had changed all things about his outward appearance, excepting the strange brilliancy of his gleaming sunken eyes, which peered forth from beneath his shaggy brows with an angry yet sad expression lighting them.

And this was John Zuriel, the lineal descendant of the ancient Israelites, the proudest and the richest man in Lanca-



shire, the most miserable being in existence. Miss Enstridge somehow found herself getting up, and advancing towards him compassionately.

‘Do you remember me?’ she asked.

‘No,’ said the old man; ‘who are you?’

‘I was your daughter’s friend,’ she answered, and he tottered to a seat and waved her off, as if the sound of her voice carried a blight with it.

‘Why are you here?’ he demanded at length; ‘what do you want, why do you wish to see me?’

‘To crave justice,’ she returned, ‘it is all I desire, it is all I ask from you.’

‘Justice!’ he repeated; ‘how did I ever injure you? what is the meaning of this?’

‘You have cast one off who is dear to me,’ returned Miss Enstridge: ‘your grandchild, Dora, Selina’s only daughter.’

‘When she married,’ interposed the old man, vehemently, ‘I banished her from my heart, my hearth, and home. What is child of hers to me? nothing—worse than nothing!’

‘Do not speak so,’ replied Miss Enstridge; ‘shame on the parent who could curse a daughter in his anger, and not repent him of the deed in calmer hours: shame to him who could let her die broken-hearted, unforgiven; shame to him who could permit the last of his race to toil for her daily bread, and not spare something out of his abundance to furnish her with the means of support!’

‘Ah!’ cried Mr Zuriel, a bitter sneer curling his trembling lips; ‘are you, too, come with the same story? I am weary of hearing it, madam—wary of my model grandchild—that pattern of filial obedience; that daughter in whom is no fault; weary of the perpetual tale which always finishes with a demand for money, or assistance. So *you* too have come to tell me she is a teacher, a governess. Be it so; I do not want to hear more about her; madam, I will not hear more,’ and the old man’s frame trembled with fury, and a hectic flush crimsoned the top of each sunken cheek, and his eyes dilated and sparkled with excitement and anger.

‘You must hear me,’ she said; but Mr Zuriel vehemently broke in with:

‘No, I will not; I am sick of the theme. You may think



that, because you are a lady, I will tolerate interference with my domestic sorrows from you, but I will not! Ask me to subscribe to a charity, and I will do it—give money to clothe the naked and feed the hungry, and I am ready; but bid me listen to details of this girl, and I say, ‘No;’ my house is my own; I will not remain to be talked at, and dictated to, by any one—even by a lady!’

‘Charity begins at home!’ sharply returned the spinster: ‘let others clothe the naked and feed the hungry; found hospitals and build churches; be liberal if you will, *afterwards*, to each and all of these; but first remember her whose young life you might render a happy one; whose sweet face, words of yours might cause to beam with pleasure; whose heart you might make joyful; from whose soul you might remove the burden which is now oppressing it. Oh! it is far too late for you to ask forgiveness of your dead child now, or to speak forgiveness unto her; but Dora, her daughter, needs assistance—give it to her; lighten her sorrow, old man, and even so may God in His mercy remove and destroy the canker-worm of unavailing repentance, which I can see is even now gnawing in your breast!’

‘It is false!’ he retorted: ‘I have never repented; I would do the same again to-morrow; I will never yield, never be talked over; I am master of my own actions, and my own money, and my own thoughts, and I will act and think as I choose, and leave my money to whom I like, as I like, without referring to or consulting with any one.’

‘I have little hope that any remonstrance of mine will induce you to alter your decision,’ rejoined Miss Enstridge, ‘but yet I cannot altogether despair when I think of the past, when I consider the present. I asked you if you remembered me, and you said, ‘No;’ yet many and many a year ago, ere much sorrow had dimmed my eyes or time had whitened your hair, I spent a day here in company with your daughter. There was a dying woman fading away when last I entered your abode, fading from amidst this magnificence, from amidst the luxury, and pomp, and splendour which surrounded her, into the tomb; that woman was your dead wife, and the intervening years have also taken a daughter away from you, chased enjoyment from your hearth, left your fireside desolate,

made a desert of your heart, removed happiness and peace far from you, leaving nothing behind but repentance and misery in their stead. Trouble and sorrow have not spared me either; relatives have died and left me desolate, yet comfort to me your grandchild has brought, comfort and pleasure unutterable; if you would know peace of mind do tardy justice unto her.'

'I would not,' said the old man, 'receive his daughter, nor own the relationship, to have my youth restored unto me.'

'And oh!' exclaimed Miss Enstridge wonderingly, 'have you found such peace and contentment in any portion of existence that you would wish to recall it? My life has surely been as blameless and tranquil as yours at all events, yet I would scarcely pass a day of it over again—most assuredly not a week! To have your youth restored unto you I can well imagine you would sacrifice but little; but to have peace poured into the bitter cup of your age, to bring sunshine into your lonely home, to make life a degree more endurable than it is at present, would you not do something? Would you not bless and receive the daughter of her who disobeyed you, and died unforgiven?'

'No!' answered Mr Zuriel. 'Dora Delorme is no more to me than the veriest stranger on earth. You are but wasting time, madam, in endeavouring to move me; no doubt your motive is kind, your intention benevolent, but a marble statue has about as much feeling for or with the sufferings of humanity, as I with the struggles of his child. Others have been here before you—others who, like you, felt an affection for and interest in this girl; they thought, as you did, that they had nothing to do but ask and be successful; but little they knew my nature; they might as well have striven to shake with their puny strength the wall of some mighty citadel as my unalterable resolve, that money of mine shall never be enjoyed by one bearing the accursed—thrice accursed—name of him who stole my child from me, and left me desolate, friendless, and lonely in my old age.'

The wild expression which gleamed in his eyes as he uttered the last few words was so like insanity, that Miss Enstridge, believing his hatred of his son-in-law to be a species of mania against which there was no use contending, which

there was not the slightest hope of overcoming, arose indignantly and yet sorrowfully to depart.

‘I came here,’ she said, ‘from London, to plead the cause of one, who should have needed no intercessor but nature on her behalf; but as nothing will move you, neither the memory of the dead, nor natural affection for the living, I say, may He who knows all hearts, turn yours, old man, ere you go where repentance availeth not: for myself, I shall return to Ilpingden, and strive to atone to this dear patient girl for the coldness and neglect of her nearest relative, save her father, and when he leaves her alone on the earth, as soon, very soon, he must do, I will be as a mother to Dora Delorme, and she like a child to me.’

A quiver passed over the millionaire’s face, and he seemed as if about to speak, but with an effort repressed the words. Feebly he rose and accompanied Miss Enstridge to the door.

‘You—you meant kindly by her memory,’ he almost gasped when they reached it; ‘is there nothing—nothing in my power to do for you individually?’

‘I have wealth sufficient,’ said the spinster, solemnly; ‘you cannot bring back the dead, but you may still repent. If so, it would be a satisfaction unspeakable to me; if not—oh! Mr Zuriel, in that world to which we all are hastening, may God forgive, and show more mercy to you than you showed towards the companion of my youth, your child, Selina:’ and Miss Enstridge wended her way back to Ilpingden, wondering how in the world she could contrive to make Dora happier—for happy the girl unquestionably was not, and although the kind-hearted lady imagined she had fathomed the secret—of some portion, at least—of her grief, yet how that grief was to be removed, or if it were capable even of alleviation, remained to her comprehension as great a mystery as ever.

She had been from the first so much attached to Dora, that the idea of being separated from her, of the girl marrying and leaving her old friend behind, preyed on Miss Enstridge’s mind so much, that she speedily determined she should become the bride of Frederick Enstridge, the nephew spoken of many chapters back, and accordingly with this view, about a month or so after her arrival, she told that young gentleman that

if he would be a good boy and get Dora Delorme to marry him, she would settle something handsome on them during her lifetime, and leave all she could to him and his wife after her death.'

In answer to which Frederick said, very ruefully: 'He would try.'

And his aunt retorted—'That was all she expected *him* to do.'

Who was to accomplish the remainder she never explained.

At this period, the young man did not like Miss Delorme; that is, he was afraid of her; and thought Eliza, the girl at his new lodgings, who brought him his breakfast, dinner, and tea, polished his boots, placed them and warm water at his door, and chatted to him between times in an easy, pleasant manner, a much nicer girl; though not so handsome nor so 'grand' as his aunt's new pet: but by degrees his timidity wore off. He grew older, too, in an incredibly short space of time; and also learned to raise his hat to a lady, instead of stealing off up a back street for fear of meeting her.

With the help of a knife, pair of scissors, or morsel of twine, he managed to keep his hands tolerably quiet; also, permitted the world to get occasional glimpses of his feet; and, gradually, altogether discarded the practice of coiling them up underneath his chair: moreover, after the first novelty of his whiskers had passed away, he did not blush quite so deep a scarlet when any one spoke to him; in brief, as his aunt triumphantly asserted, 'he was growing a fine fellow.'

Various articles of apparel, and sundry valuables, having been missed at his temporary place of abode, Eliza's boxes and drawers were subjected to an examination more rigid than pleasant; the consequence of which being, that, in addition to other property, some silver spoons, a tooth-pick, seal, and ring, belonging to Mr Enstridge, which he had *not* bestowed upon her, were discovered, she was taken before a magistrate, sentenced to imprisonment for some time, and of course dismissed from her situation—a new servant having been readily found to supply her place, between whom

and Frederick no such friendly intercourse as had existed in Eliza's time ever sprung up.

That young person had expected him to intercede for her ; but Mr Enstridge did nothing of the kind, and feeling naturally disappointed at the result of the friendship, he discarded the charms of her conversation for ever, and turned in his despair to Miss Delorme for consolation.

He was just at that age when most youths fall desperately in love with whatever girl fate throws across their paths, and by consequence in a very short time he began to imagine that his heart was irrevocably lost to Dora, who seemed strangely insensible to his numerous attractions.

She saw he was in love with her, but though he was long and tall, and in reality older than she, yet he was so very boyish and uncommonly silly that the idea of her being ever expected to fall in love with him would have seemed perfectly preposterous had the thought ever crossed her mind, which it did not. She treated him, in fine, to Miss Enstridge's chagrin, as she might a lad of ten who fancied himself devoted to her.

Why the spinster was so fond of this youth, except that he was 'warranted perfectly harmless,' it would be rather difficult to tell.

We see wise men become deeply attached to silly females, and strong-minded women frequently marry husbands not possessed of a single idea, weak, foolish, uneducated ; therefore why should Miss Enstridge not love her dead brother's only son, who, though unquestionably not overburdened with brains, had been blest by heaven with a most amiable disposition, for he permitted his aunt to scold, and train, and lecture him, and was never known to answer her with a single saucy word. And so Frances Enstridge set her heart on Dora Delorme wedding her nephew ; which wish, like most others she had ever formed, was destined never to be fulfilled.

'Pray, Dora,' said she to the girl one morning, a short time before her visit to Stor Court, 'do you never think of marrying ?'

'No, never,' was the decided though astonished reply.

'And why not ?' demanded her friend.

'Because,' replied Dora, somewhat mischievously, recalling



the first conversation they had ever held, 'I do not consider a husband the object and end of life.'

'Well, neither do I,' answered Miss Enstridge, smiling in spite of herself at having an expression she had once used turned into a weapon against herself, 'neither do I; but he might form the subject for one chapter in the book of existence for all that.'

'To some perhaps,' was the reply, 'not to me.'

'Why, do you mean to say you intend never to marry?' inquired Miss Enstridge.

'I do not think I ever shall,' answered Dora.

'Once upon a time,' said Miss Enstridge, after a pause, 'once upon a time, child, I was younger than I am now, and, what most people have been at some period or other, engaged to be married. My intended husband was a clergyman, and somehow, whether it was that excessive preaching and piety had made him dogmatical, or that I was unreasonable, we found (fortunately before the wedding) that we could not agree. We split concerning the comfort I derived from considering that some of my relatives would be mightily altered before entering into the next world, he expressed a determination to reform me in this one, and to re-model my character after I became his wife, and most ungraciously I admit, by way of return for this benevolent proposition, I said I thought, perhaps, all things taken into account, it was better we should part. In fine, we agreed to do so—the engagement by mutual consent was broken off. I packed him back his letters and so forth; he married; I subsided into old-maidenism, never made another experiment at "engaging" myself to any one; but withal consider I look and am just as happy as his wife, whom you may see any Sunday in church here, sitting demurely in the parson's pew.'

'Mrs Imlach?' inquired Dora.

'Precisely; now you see this is my history, I mean matrimonially; but then, you and I are of such different natures that what suits the one might not the other. For instance, had I married, I must either have governed my husband, in which case I should have despised him, or had constant quarrels. No man will or ought to submit to be governed; I would not, by mortal; but you might. I know you could never



live as I did for many years, utterly alone, not having a creature whom I really cared for to speak a word to, for days, weeks, months together.'

She paused as if expecting some reply, and Dora said, still resolutely: 'I shall not marry, I have my father to love.'

'And then?' asked Miss Enstridge.

'Then!' repeated Dora, hurriedly, 'what do you mean?'

'When you have no father on earth.'

'Die!' replied the girl, her eyes filling with tears, as she uttered the single word.

'No, my child,' said the spinster, 'we cannot die when we would. The body generally, or at least frequently, outlives the affections; when the latter have nothing left to love on earth they follow the objects of our fondest attachments to the grave, and lie quietly with them there; but the body lives on. No, no, believe me, Dora, grief does *not* kill; if it did, the churchyards would be twice as full as they are.'

There was a long pause; then Miss Enstridge added: 'Dora, you must marry, and make a new tie for yourself.'

The girl looked up with a bright smile. 'Who would marry me?' she asked. 'I never had but one offer in my life.'

'And pray why did you not accept it?' demanded her friend.

'Oh! he was such a detestable man, nobody excepting Miss Griffiths would ever have thought of taking him;' and Dora smiled at the very idea, whilst Miss Enstridge, inwardly comforted, pursued—

'Well, there is my nephew, Frederick; I am sure a more amiable being never existed, and he is very fond of you, and, dear Dora, so am I; and I know he would make you happy!'

So this was the conclusion towards which Miss Enstridge had been leading the conversation. Dora felt an almost irresistible inclination to laugh, but controlled the impulse as she remarked—

'He is so very young.'

'He is older than you, and head and shoulders taller,' tartly responded Miss Enstridge.

The dread of offending the kind-hearted lady kept her from smiling; but the idea of Frederick as a husband seemed to her

so preposterous, that it was with difficulty she kept her muscles in a state of becoming rigidity, while Miss Enstridge proceeded—

‘Do you not like him?’

‘Oh! yes, very much, but really indeed—that is—he is so very young.’

‘He will grow old soon enough,’ remarked Miss Enstridge; ‘if that be your sole objection, rest assured it need not be an insuperable one.’

‘It is not my sole objection,’ stammered Dora, ‘I could not care enough for him—I—’

‘Ah! nonsense, child,’ exclaimed the other; ‘listen, Dora, I told him you would marry him, I felt sure—and what is more—I mean you to do it.’

Dora started from her seat—‘No, Miss Enstridge, you surely did not say so—you cannot be serious.’

‘Perfectly serious!’ was the reply; ‘never was more so in my life.’

‘I like your nephew very much,’ said Dora, feeling it was absolutely necessary for her to say something; ‘I think him most amiable. I am certain his present means and expectations are far, far better than those of any one who ever would think of marrying me; and yet, indeed, indeed, I cannot marry him; it is quite impossible; I cannot, indeed.’

Miss Enstridge rubbed her forehead violently; then exclaimed: ‘It is most provoking! why on earth did you not tell me this before?’

‘I could not know he wished to marry me,’ responded Dora, deprecatingly; ‘and it certainly never once occurred to me, that you would wish a girl without a shilling to become your niece.’

‘Oh! I like you—which I never did any girl before, for years; and if there be money on the one side, why, it is quite sufficient: and, in fact, I had set my heart on the match. Come, Dora, do be good-natured, and say you will give in,’ urged the poor lady, in a tone of the warmest entreaty.

‘I cannot! oh, indeed, I cannot! I wish I could,’ said Dora, almost weeping as she spoke: ‘oh! Miss Enstridge, I would do almost anything in the world to please you, but this is impossi-

ble:’ and the elder woman, looking into the girl’s troubled eyes, felt she was merely speaking the truth.

‘Tell me, child,’ demanded Miss Enstridge, somewhat sorrowfully, ‘do you like any one else?’

‘No,’ said poor Dora, wondering in her very heart, why two persons should ask her a similar question: ‘no; I know no one I would marry.’

The gray eyes read down into her soul: ‘You are evading my question!’ exclaimed the owner of them, sternly; ‘tell me honestly and fairly, Dora—speak openly to your mother’s schoolfellow, your true friend—I shall not be angry with you: do you like any one else?’

Dora sank on her knees, bending her face, buried in her hands, upon them.

‘I answered you truly,’ she said, in a stifled voice—‘quite truly: I know no one I would marry—not one! Once there was a person did me a great service. I would work for him, do anything I could for him, I ought to be grateful for ever to him, but we shall never see each other again; more than a friend he can never be to me.’

‘Why, is he married?’ asked the spinster.

‘No: that is—he was not—he may be now,’ returned Dora. ‘I know nothing of him; but married or single, it makes no difference—it is all the same to me.’

‘And why on earth would you not take him for better or for worse, if things suited?’

‘Because things do not suit—can never suit,’ said Dora, rising and drawing herself up to her full height; ‘because I am proud; because he is rich, and I a beggar; because—’ but the bitter thought that prompted ‘because one so honourable as he would never marry my father’s child,’ somehow choked all further utterance. ‘Do not ask me any more,’ she added, after a pause, as she turned away: ‘I have said what I had better not have said; you will think I feel what I do not feel—love—when it is only gratitude. No, I shall never marry; I am fond, really fond of no one out of heaven, save you and my father.’

But the lady had her own shrewd opinion on the subject, which materially hastened her expedition to Stor Court, the

unsuccessful termination of which was faithfully recorded at the commencement of this chapter.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

HAVING made up her mind that an unrequited attachment, or a misplaced affection at all events, was and must be the cause of Dora's unhappiness, Miss Enstridge set herself industriously to work to learn who the object of this wonderful devotion might be, and why no correspondence of any kind, direct or indirect, took place between them, but in vain, and she had just resolved to let time develop the matter, or raise Dora's spirits, when a fresh circumstance occurred, which threw her somewhat out in her previous calculations, and made her reluctantly confess that the girl was a complete enigma to her understanding.

The truth is, it was solely the length of time which had elapsed without a single shilling of the debt being returned to Mr Lesparde which was the primary cause of Dora's great depression, her perpetual anxiety; so unhappy in fine did she at length become, that she resolved to send all she had yet been able to hoard as an earnest that if life and health were spared he should in course of years be repaid the remainder. Very possibly he did not require the money; he had certainly requested her never to think of the matter again, but she had voluntarily undertaken that the debt should be discharged, and if she delayed longer, might he—not knowing how earnestly she had striven, how ceaselessly she had toiled, never reflecting how difficult it is for any one, more especially a woman, to make a little fortune—not deem that she was forgetful at least, if not absolutely dishonest. And in perfect solitude, when no human eye was upon her, the blood mounted to her temples at the bare idea. Yes, she must send all she had, and that forthwith, and from the moment she concluded to adopt this course, she appeared so much gayer, so much

more like a young person, that Miss Enstridge felt fairly mystified, as nothing particularly pleasant had occurred, which, in her opinion, served to account for the alteration in her favourite's manner.

One morning, however, when she somewhat unexpectedly entered the sitting-room, she found Dora sitting there alone, a pen in her hand, some sheets of note-paper scattered on the table before her, and her head bent earnestly over one of them.

Apparently Miss Enstridge guessed that her first impulse had been to bundle up the papers and put them away, for although the girl did not yield to the feeling, but sat still, merely greeting her friend with a smile, yet the latter imagined she saw a disturbed expression on Dora's face, and accordingly, after looking with a severe countenance upon her, and taking violent possession of a chair near one of the windows, she seized the paper and commenced to read *The Times* through, a feat she performed every day, the only portions she omitted being those set apart for advertisements of schools and servants, and these she merely overlooked because, as she devoutly said—'Thank Heaven, I do not want to be educated again, or to be plagued with any professed cook or clever housemaid.'

At the end of every sentence, however, on the morning in question, she glanced over the top of the paper at Dora, who was employed in writing a few words on sheet after sheet, flinging each in succession aside, as if dissatisfied with her efforts.

'You seem to find that a very difficult letter to write,' Miss Enstridge remarked, when she could 'stand it no longer.'

Thus addressed, Dora looked up quickly, as though startled, and blushed deeply.

'Can I assist you?' Miss Enstridge further demanded.

'No, thank you,' was the hurried answer, 'I—I believe I know now what to say.'

'Oh, of course I do not wish to pry into your affairs,' rejoined the other snappishly; 'if I could have helped you I would, since I cannot, I will read my paper and not disturb you again.' Dora longed to pacify her, but this she well knew

could not be effected without an exhibition of the note, or explanation of its contents, for which reason she concluded she must permit Miss Enstridge to be displeased if she chose, and proceeded with her writing in silence.

The little hint thrown out by the spinster, however, had the effect of considerably aiding her invention, for forthwith she speedily finished a short note, placed it and another paper inside of an envelope; then sealed all up and directed the letter to Mr Lesparde.

Certainly Miss Enstridge must have been endowed with the faculty of doing two things at a time, if she read *The Times* properly that morning, for she never removed her eyes from Dora's face till the note, sealing, direction, and all was accomplished.

Her own exceedingly far-sighted, clear-seeing orbs had beheld a bank-note, or order, or something of the money tribe put by that girl into that letter. What did it all mean she wanted to know, but in all probability she never would have even a gleam more light thrown on the subject, for Dora, usually communicative and frank enough, evidently did not intend taking any one into her confidence, concerning what that epistle was about, where it was going to, and for whose especial edification it had been penned.

Really it was almost more than Miss Enstridge felt capable of, to remain silent and ask no question concerning so unwonted, so perplexing, so provoking a mystery.

Whatever that innocent-looking sheet of paper might contain, the post-office at Ilpingden did not receive it, for Emily was despatched the next day to London, and, as Miss Enstridge correctly concluded, bore the letter with her.

'If it be money, or the want of it, that makes the girl wretched, why she shall not long remain so,' thought the lady on the same afternoon, after she returned from an energetic ramble, untying her bonnet with such determination that one of the strings came off in her hand; and accordingly she took an early opportunity of telling 'Dora, child, that she thought she ought to be getting rich now.'

Dora replied with a very guilty blush, and unmistakeable start, that 'she was sorry to say she was not.'



‘Well, you ought to be, that’s all,’ retorted Miss Enstridge. ‘Let me see, you might put aside a hundred pounds per annum easily, I should say.’

Dora murmured something about expenses, but Miss Enstridge, warming with her subject as was her wont, and determining to say what was in her mind at once, interrupted her with ‘Nonsense—I know very well what your expenses are—heavy enough in all conscience, but still not so heavy as all that comes to; listen to me for a moment, for I feel as though you were my daughter, and am interested accordingly. Do you not think you could contrive to live without this everlasting hammering on the piano, and counting one, two, three, four, from morning until night, the only variety being you sometimes only count to three, and at others get on to six, when I believe you invariably return to one?’

Dora smiled, but it was a rather sad smile, for Miss Enstridge had certainly described very concisely the mode in which the greater portion of her life was spent—it was a very monotonous existence, and she *was* tired of it; but still she answered, ‘I must go on, there is no help for it.’

‘It would gratify me very much if you would relinquish teaching,’ suggested Miss Enstridge. ‘I am perfectly sick of those exercises, of “Au claire de la lune,” “Ah vous dirai-je,” “Hertz Quadrilles,” and “Ma Nacelle;” and, dear Dora, fifty times more sick of seeing you wearing yourself out instructing these horrid Ilpingden children—the most disagreeable, pert, tiresome creatures I ever beheld.’

‘I do not particularly care either for my profession or my pupils,’ responded the young teacher; ‘but, as I said before, there is no help for it. I cannot do without the money, or I would shut up the piano to-morrow, and, I think, never open it again so long as I lived.’

‘Tell me,’ said Miss Enstridge, after she had digested this reply, ‘does this money of your father’s die with him, or will it come to you?’

‘Never to me,’ answered Dora. ‘I have not an expectation of ten pounds from any one.’

‘I see—and so you are saving up a fortune for yourself.’

‘I have not saved a shilling,’ was the satisfactory reply.

‘And what in the world, child, then do you do with the money you make, for you do not spend it all I am positive?’ burst forth the spinster.

‘I had rather not tell you,’ answered Dora.

The lady stopped in full course. This reply was like a blank stone wall at the end of a lane—there was no getting over it; well, she could go round.

‘I do not want to pry into your secrets, Dora,’ she said at length; ‘but I know you have one if not more, which is injuring your health, and depressing your spirits, perhaps breaking your heart. At one time I imagined it was not a pecuniary matter that caused you such harass, but one which I was impotent to remove; latterly, however, I have arrived at a different conclusion, and, as I cannot bear to see you melancholy, and as it distresses me to watch you pinching and saving, and counting how many shillings are in every sovereign before you venture to spend one of them, all I have to say is this, that if money in any sum, large or small, would conduce to your happiness, I had fifty times rather give you the amount at once than see you thus stinting yourself of everything natural and proper to your age. It makes me heart-sick.’

Dora paused—the offer was so tempting—it would remove so instantaneously a load from her mind—she could not refuse it. Accordingly, after a moment’s hesitation, she answered in a tremulous voice—

‘Miss Enstridge, from the day we first met, you have been consistently kind to me. I have told you everything I knew of myself which I could tell without involving others; but since you have guessed that a pecuniary difficulty has been oppressing me, I admit that, to discharge an old debt, I have struggled, toiled, and economized for years. I know you will not press me to tell you more, for I cannot reveal the origin of that debt. Every person has some secret, I believe, which she would shrink from communicating even to a dear friend, and I am no exception to the general rule; but if you would lend me the large amount which, unhappily, spite of all my efforts, still remains unpaid, you would confer an obligation on me greater than words can tell.’

‘I will give it to you,’ said the spinster.

‘I cannot have it on that condition,’ answered Dora. ‘I

must repay you, but you will let me have an immense time for so doing.'

'Well, well, take it as you like, on any terms, repay or not, just as you like, only take it; how much do you want?'

'Three hundred and fifty pounds,' confessed Dora, casting down her eyes as she spoke, but almost immediately raising them again to see what effect the mention of that sum had produced on her friend.

Miss Enstridge certainly looked surprised, but she made no remark—no comment of any kind; drawing her desk towards her and producing a cheque-book from it, she wrote an order for the amount, and handing it over to Dora, said:

'And if such a trifle as this could have brought peace to your heart months since, why, you silly reserved creature, did you not say to one who loves you dearly: "I want a few hundred pounds, will you give them to me?" The greatest pleasure in being rich is to be able to render others tolerably happy; you will know this from experience hereafter; there must be a bright future in store for you, child; there—there, don't begin to cry just when I wanted to see you smile,' and the lady pushed the rich dark hair back from the girl's forehead, and kissed it fondly; whilst Dora sobbed as if she had been in very deed and truth what Miss Enstridge so frequently called her—a child.

'It is all her father's doing,' soliloquized her friend, after Dora had gone quietly to her own room, 'some folly or extravagance of his; and these are the sort of men that gentle women break their hearts about, and cling to, and love in spite of sense, and right, and reason; and better men wed selfish, silly, heartless beings like Lucy Enstridge; and—and so the world goes on,' abruptly finished the spinster, wiping a tear from her cheek, which had fallen there as the contrast between how Major Delorme, with all his faults, was idolized, and how her brother, with all his virtues, was forgotten, swept across her mind, and filled it full to overflowing with bitter, useless reflections.

And Dora Delorme, after years of anxiety, at length laid her head on her pillow with an easy mind, if not with a happy heart; he was at length repaid—every pound, principal, interest, all; and Miss Enstridge would not hurry her for it: she knew,

indeed, that kind friend from choice would rather it was never spoken of again; and the old wound was closed—if never thoroughly cured, and with a lighter step, and an almost unclouded brow, Dora moved about the house, and attended to her father and talked cheerfully to Miss Enstridge; and the latter began to hope that in time, perhaps, she might think differently about Frederick, and altogether a shadow seemed to have departed from out the house towards which the spectre death was stealing.

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### CHAPTER XXXIII.

PERHAPS during the whole course of the thirty-three or thirty-four years which he had passed in this world Mr Edmund Lesparde had never felt so completely bewildered, so thoroughly mystified, as when Dora Delorme's first letter reached him.

He read the few lines her note contained, and turned it over and over with a puzzled air; he looked at the money enclosed, finally at the superscription. What in the name of all that was perplexing could the girl mean? Why, she had paid him the full amount, or her father had, three years before; then what could be the object of this raking up of the whole affair, which had lived, died, and been buried long ago? What could have induced her to remit something like half of the debt, and hope in time to be able to pay the remainder? Had she suddenly been deprived of her senses, or had he, Edmund Lesparde, lost his?

Could it be that Major Delorme had never told his daughter of having liquidated the debt; that silently, quietly, and perseveringly she had hoarded this money in some way, and now sent him a part, fearing he might imagine she had renewed her promise more hastily than considerately? Had she been tormenting herself ever since they last parted concerning a matter which he had hoped was settled then—which somebody cer-

tainly had settled since? What was the meaning of it? Mr Lesparde read the letter again for the twentieth time, and then it suddenly struck him that it was dated from nowhere; that no acknowledgment or return was rendered possible; that in course of time more money would be coming; it was the strangest thing, first and last, he had ever met with. Have it explained he must, but who or what was to explain it unto him? Not any knowledge of his; not the grim individual who had come like a character out of a German fiend legend, to hand him over five hundred and twenty-five pounds, and get an acknowledgment for the same, and after performing his mission had departed to the nether regions for all he, Mr Lesparde, knew to the contrary; not from Dora, for her epistle stated in no way her residence; it merely bore the London post-mark. Was there no one to enlighten him?

Suddenly he removed his hand from his forehead and laid it on the bell-pull.

‘Go down to the bank, John, with my compliments to Mr Champion; I want to see him at once;’ which message the servant delivering verbatim, the banker, not comprehending whether a death, marriage, or debt might not be the original cause of the sudden summons, left his books, clerks, and all *et ceteras* to take care of themselves and each other, and hurried off without a moment’s delay to his friend.

‘Well, Lesparde, here I am: what is the matter?’

‘Why, nothing perhaps to justify my urgent request for an immediate interview, assuredly nothing to cause any anxiety, though I confess to being completely, downrightly mystified: can you throw any light on that letter?’ and he handed Dora’s note over to the banker, and watched him whilst he read it twice through, the first time rapidly and the second slowly.

‘What is the meaning of it?’ he asked, when Mr Champion laid it down.

‘Is not that self-evident?’ returned the latter, with some surprise. ‘Miss Delorme desires to repay a portion of a debt incurred by her father, and to that end sends you a bank order, or something of the sort, something in my way, together with a very brief little quiet note, regretting her object should have been so long of accomplishment, but hoping that in time it will be

completely fulfilled; is it not so? that certainly is the way I interpret the business.'

'And it is the way I should interpret it, too,' responded Edmund, 'but that Major Delorme does not owe me a sixpence; has not done so for years.'

'Well, you know, I never exactly understood, never inquired, never, in fact, desired, quite to understand how you and he, or perhaps, to speak more correctly, how you and she, arranged that affair; most probably, however, you meant the five hundred as a free gift, but that she was proud or independent, or obtuse, or something, and either would not be indebted to any one for so large an amount, or else understood it to be advanced merely as a loan, which she or her father was to repay whenever money became rather more plentiful: the affair is clearly a misunderstanding, the only unmistakable part of the whole being that you paid five hundred pounds, and that Miss Delorme has now returned a part of that sum to you.'

'But you do not understand!' exclaimed Mr Lesparde, impatiently: 'I never wanted to hear more of the money again, but, as you say, probably Miss Delorme was proud, and would not take a gift from me—that may all be; it is not that which perplexes me: the fact is, the whole amount, together with the interest for one year, was repaid to me, twelve months after Delorme left here.'

'Is it possible?' ejaculated the banker.

'It is not merely possible, but perfectly true,' returned Edmund; 'so, what this second remittance means, or what has prompted Miss Delorme to send half the amount of a debt incurred four years ago, which was discharged almost immediately, I confess myself utterly, totally unable to tell.'

'But did *she* send you the sum before?' demanded Mr Champion.

'I do not know. One morning, a very solemn-looking individual, whom I imagined to be a lawyer, walked into this room, pulled out some bank-notes, announced that he came to refund five hundred pounds, which I had advanced a year previously for the accommodation of Major Arthur Auguste Delorme: together with interest thereon for twelve months. He requested an acknowledgment—would listen to no remonstrance; and, before I had well recovered from my surprise, was gone.'



‘Well,’ remarked Mr Champion, after a pause, taking Dora’s note in his hand once again, ‘there is an individual, we know, not so black as he is generally painted.’

‘I admit I did do Delorme mentally great injustice,’ returned Mr Lesparde with much simplicity: ‘but why he should have kept the whole affair of the re-payment a secret from his daughter I cannot imagine.’

‘You don’t think *he* sent it, do you?’ said the banker.

‘He must, for it is now evident that Miss Delorme did not. I at the time concluded he had dropped somehow into a comfortable fortune, and felt glad on his account, and especially so on hers, that such was the case.’

‘Dropped into a fortune!’ repeated Mr Champion: ‘my dear fellow, at that time, or at least shortly before it, he was residing in very second-rate London lodgings, knowing no one, seeing no one, his pretty child wearing herself to a skeleton teaching from morning till night.’

‘Then who could have repaid that money? Champion, did you? tell me frankly, though if you say “yes”! I believe I shall never forgive you.’

‘No, indeed, I did not; I thought you were far better able to lose five hundred pounds than I, and hoped and believed it was a pleasure to you to lose it; for the rest, suppose we settle the business by concluding it to have been a sort of Christian proceeding of the “gentleman in black.”’

‘With whom you seem to have some kind of acquaintance,’ remarked Mr Lesparde: ‘but what am I to do; I do not know where to find Miss Delorme, nor what to say to her if I could find her; you appear to have heard more about their movements than I. Who told you she was a teacher? poor young creature, perhaps over-exerting herself to repay me this detestable money: who told you about her?’

‘That impertinent scoundrel Conroy Bradshaw,’ replied the banker, ‘who has effrontery to do anything, sense to conceal nothing. He, it appears (I may as well tell you the whole story at once), was asked by Delorme to lend him five hundred pounds, but would not; after which, being struck by the daughter’s beauty, he offered to give him the amount he required if he would guarantee him his child’s hand should he think fit hereafter to ask it; there—there, don’t look so angry, it is all

past now, and it did not do the girl any harm at the time, more especially as her father turned him out of doors for his pains. You know the history of your bill-business better than I do; but when these unfortunate Delormes went to London to seek quietness and oblivion, Bradshaw by some means ferretted them out, insisted that the young lady had better marry him than remain a governess during the term of her natural life; in brief, so far as I can learn, so tormented her, that in very despair she and her father fled from London and took up their abode somewhere in the country: then in a tiff I suppose he married his present wife, who was daughter to the person in whose house both he and the Major lodged: and now do you think it likely Delorme had the wherewithal, even supposing him possessed of the inclination, to repay you that five hundred pounds?’

‘And so that poor girl—’ began Mr Lesparde.

‘Instead of being an heiress, or daughter to a man of property, as you supposed, has, I have no doubt, during the whole course of these long years, been economizing and teaching to provide luxuries for her father and to pay his debts,’ concluded Mr Champion, looking steadily in Mr Lesparde’s face to see what impression this speech produced.

‘Why could you not have told me this sooner?’ demanded the other.

‘Because, in the first place, I never guessed until this morning the end to which Miss Delorme was devoting her energies. Again, I did not know either, that the bill-money had been repaid, or was ever to be repaid; and, finally, I was not aware you were *particularly* interested either in the Major or his daughter.’

Mr Lesparde reddened at the stress his friend laid on that one word; and, without replying directly to the foregoing sentence, exclaimed:

‘I wish I knew who sent that man here! Are you not really at the bottom of the mystery?’

‘I assure you I never heard that such a person had been here—never suspected a thing of the kind till ten minutes since, when you enlightened me.’

‘What would I not give to see him!’ said Edmund.

‘Should you know him again?’ demanded his friend.

‘Among a thousand,’ returned Mr Lesparde.

Upon which reply, the banker mused for some minutes, then said: ‘You must return that money to Miss Delorme immediately.’

‘And how is that apparent impossibility to be effected?’ demanded Mr Lesparde; ‘where am I to see her; where am I to learn her place of abode; who will enable me to find her?’

‘I will do my best to discover her whereabouts,’ said Mr Champion, rising. ‘Come and dine with me to-morrow, and I will tell you the result of my inquiries; meanwhile, keep yourself quiet, the affair will explain itself in time.’ And, after giving this piece of gratuitous advice and consolation, the banker departed: a sort of satisfied smile hovering around his frank, good-humoured mouth; whilst Edmund Lesparde remained alone, to read Dora’s letter again; to marvel concerning its contents, and to think of what Mr Champion had communicated to him about Mr Bradshaw and the Major’s daughter.

‘What a leveler poverty is,’ he thought, ‘when a fellow like that dared to propose for her; poor Dora!’ and somehow his thoughts fled back to the days when she was a child, when he was a very young man; when no one could have conceived that Major Delorme would ever have fallen so low as to be insulted by that impudent *parvenu*, Conroy Bradshaw. ‘I am glad he turned him out of the house, though,’ said Mr Lesparde, ‘it looks as if he had a regard for his daughter, after all.’

Two or three days passed by, and still Mr Champion’s inquiries were unsuccessful. Where Dora and her father had resided Mr Bradshaw speedily informed him; but where they dwelt now, he professed himself, and truly, incompetent to tell. Mr Lesparde endured this state of suspense patiently enough, until Dora’s second letter, enclosing the remainder of the debt, reached him.

‘I have been thinking,’ said he to Mr Champion, when that gentleman came to beg a little more delay: ‘I have been thinking, that Delorme’s half-pay must be remitted to him from somewhere to some place; surely, that clue, properly followed, ought to be sufficient—at all events, I am resolved to try, and mean to go to London forthwith.’

For a few minutes, it seemed to Mr Lesparde, that the banker did not appear very cordially to approve of the determination; but, after the latter had reflected concerning the matter, his face brightened: and, as if he had satisfactorily disposed of some difficult question, he said—

‘Very well—I think it is a capital idea: and if you will defer your departure till after to-morrow, I will go with you.’

‘With me!’ exclaimed Mr Lesparde, in some surprise; ‘there is not the slightest necessity.’

‘My dear fellow, what an exceedingly unpolite speech!’ replied Mr Champion, laughing; ‘for your business, I admit, there does exist no necessity that I should go with you; but for my own—that is quite a different affair. If you will not let me travel in your company, I must do so alone, for I want to see Miss Delorme, too.’

‘Oh! of course I shall be very glad of your society,’ said the other, who looked, however, despite of the word ‘glad,’ wonderfully vexed, ‘but really, Champion, a short time since you appeared inclined to throw cold water on my London expedition altogether, and now you volunteer to come with me. I believe you know and understand more about this business than you feel disposed to tell me.’

‘Pray do not begin to be suspicious, or I shall say—well—never mind what—that you are not the Edmund Lesparde of old; perhaps I wish, like you, to know more of this business, and the sole cause for my apparent dislike to your scheme was wondering if *my* ends could not have been more speedily reached by a short delay, but I see they could not, or that at least it makes no difference, so let us go, I say, together.’

And as a natural result of this conversation, one day when Miss Enstridge was out, Dora Delorme started to see two gentlemen pausing before the cottage; one of whom was Mr Lesparde, the other Mr Champion.

What could they want? somehow the girl’s heart misgave her when she saw them; was it a new sorrow they were bringing to her, just after the old one had been removed? she covered her eyes with her hand as the memory of when and where she had last met those two together, on what business, and what its results had been, swept across her mind; when

she looked up again, it was to greet, sadly, timidly, almost imploringly, her friend, Edmund Lesparde.

And that other, who had been her unsuspected friend through years, who had thought of her, when Edmund had almost forgotten there was such a person in existence, whose heart had often felt sad to consider what a crushing blight had fallen so suddenly on the young life, who had silently striven to make her lot a happier one, but failed in the attempt, he also took the white delicate hand in his, and looking earnestly into the sad, pale, much altered, but hardly less beautiful face, read in its changed steadfast expression, the weary history of the last four years. It troubled him to reflect on all which had occurred since their last interview; years, long years, before, a daughter, just growing into womanhood, had died, and left him very solitary, and he had never looked in a young sweet face, from that period, without becoming interested in it, and feeling desirous of making the road of life smooth and happy unto its possessor.

There are some persons to whom the bare fact of one of their fellows standing in need of assistance seems cause sufficient to draw them closer to him—and Mr Champion was, indeed, one of those individuals who appear to have caught that heavenly attribute—universal charity—even whilst dwelling in the midst of a world where much charity, alas! abideth not. Charitable—not in the restricted sense of the word which many are, but in the broader sense, which very few attach unto it,—whilst his reason and judgment perceived the weaknesses, failings, and sins of others, his heart extenuated their faults, and made allowance for them; his ear was ever open to the tale of grief; his best abilities were devoted to relieve sorrow; no one, young or old, high or low, rich or poor, ever sought advice or assistance from the kind-hearted banker, and turned away disappointed—for if it were beyond his skill to cure the malady, bodily, mental, or pecuniary, which was oppressing them, he gave that which only in vulgar minds is next to contempt—pity; and loved the sufferer better because of his great distress, and need of love and sympathy.

Edmund Lesparde had disappointed him; he knew his abilities; he saw his good; he admired his high honourable principles; but he sighed to see God's best gifts turned to no



account; to behold the young man frittering away his time in utter vanity, in a round of perpetual amusement; to perceive him burying his talents—hiding them apparently for ever amid the hollow glare and false glitter of that bright circle, in which he persisted that, if it were not wise or profitable, it was at least pleasant and congenial for him to spend the entire of those years, that might have been devoted, so Mr Champion considered, to some higher end—some nobler purpose.

‘You are wasting your life,’ he said to him repeatedly; to which the other generally replied,

‘Perhaps so, but it is a pleasant life enough, and suits me a great deal better than any other mode of existence could do.’ Since the affair with Miss Durrant, however, the banker had occasionally entertained hopes of him, for although Edmund still persisted that the life was a pleasant one, when Mr Champion affirmed it was at best thoroughly useless, the former occasionally added to his former reply,

‘I confess I do feel often a little bored; greatly tired of myself, the world, and the people in it; but I am fit for nothing better: in fact, I do not think there is anything better.’

‘Do you really believe what your words imply?’ generally exclaimed the banker; which question Mr Lesparde sometimes answered with a half-suppressed yawn and a very dubious smile.

‘You remember, Champion, the words of him who was a preacher in and a king over Israel, the wisest among men: “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”’

‘If you were really as weary as you profess,’ returned Mr Champion on one occasion, ‘you would strive to discover whether some works may not be more satisfactory than others: time and wisdom are all powerful—time and wisdom *must* make a useful character out of you yet.’

These, then, were the two who came to see Dora Delorme, one of whom, the banker, expressed pleasure at the meeting, whilst the other looked gloomily in her face, and wondered if that debt, that old grief, her father’s illness, were sufficient to account for the melancholy expression that dwelt in her soft eyes; for her changed appearance; for the thinness of her cheek, the transparency of her hands: is she ill, he wondered,



or unhappy, or has she been overtaxing her strength to return me that money?

Somehow as the last idea crossed his mind, his thoughts flitted back to Miss Durrant, to the promises she had broken, the presents she had retained; and he mentally recanted his former libel that all women were alike, and bethought him it was quite possible for there to be as great a difference in character as in face: and he considered, moreover, that though Agatha Durrant had been very handsome, something equally lovely might dwell within Dora Delorme's breast, something more precious than waves of raven hair, or chiselled features, or fascinating manners: that pearl beyond all price, enjoyed by some, appreciated by most, undervalued only by a few: that gift direct from God—a truthful, honest, tender heart.

For the first time in his life Edmund Lesparde found himself thinking so much that to speak was an effort; but at length, considering Mr Champion had exhausted all the ordinary topics, which people frequently discuss before speaking of the business that was the primary and sole cause of bringing them together, he said:

‘I believe I have to acknowledge the receipt of two letters from you, Miss Delorme?’

The colour mantled Dora's cheek with all the uncertain brilliancy of old as she returned,

‘Yes.’

‘Could I sooner have discovered your place of abode I should earlier have been here,’ continued Mr Lesparde, then paused as if at a loss how to proceed. ‘I had hoped,’ he added, ‘that in consideration of what very good friends we were once at “The Oaks,” and on account of what subsequently passed between us, you would not have been too proud to permit me to serve you even in a very trifling manner, that you would not have denied me the gratification of thinking I had once been of a little use to you; but as I find I have been disappointed in that hope, I have called this day to express sincere, heartfelt regret that you permitted any pecuniary arrangements between your father and myself to rest on your mind, and cause you evident harass, toil, and uneasiness: also to restore—’

‘No,’ interrupted Dora vehemently, ‘that must not be, Mr Lesparde. How you have discovered our residence I

cannot imagine, but you will not, I feel sure, pain me by alluding farther to this subject. It is not pride,' she continued, tears springing to her eyes, 'not pride which makes me urge this request, but it is right that the money should be returned to you; the kindness you showed about it *then* ought to render my father and myself grateful to you for life.'

It was not a very connected speech certainly, but her auditors managed to comprehend it, and Mr Champion, who had risen and walked to the window, as if to leave Edmund a monopoly of Miss Delorme and the conversation, regarded both with no little interest and curiosity.

'You misunderstand me,' said Mr Lesparde, when she had quite concluded. 'I presume—indeed I see from your letters—that you are unaware of the fact of the entire amount having been repaid twelve months after you and your father left Orpen.'

When Edmund Lesparde received Dora's first letter he did not look more completely confounded than did she upon hearing his statement. She was so amazed that at first she could not speak, but then she said, seeing her visitor lay down a cheque on the table:

'Is it true?'

Mr Lesparde could not help smiling; the expression of disbelief was so perfectly simple and natural.

'Quite true,' he answered, 'and at the time I thought some favourable change must have taken place in Major Delorme's affairs, and that he, like you, being a little proud or independent (which word you choose), had sent it to me, but I regret to find my conclusion to have been incorrect; and now I know no more about the affair than you, except that the entire sum was returned to me by some one years since.'

'And you have no idea by whom?' she said at length.

'Not the most remote,' he replied.

'And you are not telling me this merely to induce me to take back the money?' she earnestly pursued.

'No!' broke in Mr Champion, 'I will answer for him in that respect. It would be a very pious fraud certainly, but one I am sure he would not commit; even such an end could scarcely justify such means. You may be confident that what he tells you is literally the case.'

Dora rose from her seat, and walking across to where the white-haired man was standing, laid a fair wasted hand impressively on his arm, and looking with her large beautiful eyes into his kind, honest face, said in a low tone: 'Tell me candidly—did you not pay it?'

'In all truth and sincerity, no,' he returned.

'Thank God!' exclaimed she, 'then *he* must, for none—not one—in this wide world but we four knew of it. How he did it, or why he never told me, it is impossible to say, but *he* must have paid the debt—thank God for it!'

And her face was covered for an instant by her delicate hands, as though she were too thankful to let even the light of day behold her joy; then she turned to Mr Lesparde and said:

'More than money, or houses, or land, you have brought me to-day. I cannot tell you how grateful I am for the past and the present; will you believe me?'

As she spoke a fresh feeling from the olden time swept across the heart of Edmund Lesparde. 'She is the same as ever,' he thought; 'neither sorrow, nor years, nor the world, has changed Dora since then.'

Since when? Why, since she was a gentle child, bemoaning her mother's death, and during the course of his drive back to London Mr Lesparde found himself considering—as he recollected her first remark concerning her dead parent—whether it was not quite possible for there to be some very perfect specimens of angels found even on this side Heaven.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

'I SUPPOSE,' said Mr Champion to his companion, as they sat together after dinner, on the evening of the day upon which they had paid their visit to Ilpingden, 'I suppose you will return to Orpen immediately?'

‘Well, no, not just immediately,’ said Mr Lesparde, looking intently into his wine-glass: ‘as I am here, why I may as well stay here for a little time.’

‘I quite agree with you,’ returned the banker, in a tone which annoyed Mr Lesparde, but he did not answer the remark otherwise than by a very slight increase of colour.

‘You see,’ pursued Mr Champion, ‘London is so particularly gay at present, and the theatres are so especially attractive, and the pavement is so cool and pleasant this scorching weather, and altogether, in fact, town is so exceedingly desirable a dwelling-place in the height of summer, that I do not wonder at your preferring to remain here rather than return at once to Orpen.’

‘I did not come here to be gay, or to attend the theatres,’ said Mr Lesparde.

‘I know you did not; but as only half the latter are shut up, and as London is not more than two-thirds empty, you might remain in it for a little pleasure.’

‘I mean to do so,’ rejoined Edmund rather testily: ‘and you are—’

‘Going to leave town to-morrow,’ supplied Mr Champion.

‘Indeed—for Orpen!’

‘No, not direct; I must make a *détour* before my return home. I told you I had business, and I have, so now I mean to leave you to amuse yourself during the remainder of this evening as best you can; I shall see you again, however, before my departure from London;’ and even as he spoke Mr Champion arose, took his hat, and relieving Mr Lesparde of his presence, walked off straight to the residence of a certain Mr Scott, which residence was situated in Bedford Square.

It was somewhat late when he arrived there, but as Mr Scott’s visitors usually brought more than themselves with them, and generally took six and eightpence less away in their pockets, he generously did not stand on ceremony with any of them, but could be seen at all hours of the day, and if people had chosen to call on him then, would have risen—kind-hearted soul—in the middle of the night to grant them an interview; for which reason the moment Mr Champion announced that he came on ‘business,’ he was ushered into a sort of dentist’s receiving-room, where the state of cases was investigated in lieu

of decayed teeth, and instead of stuffing being put in bone, patching was performed at so much the piece on doubtful titles, where old pedigrees were investigated, old rights talked of, questionable deeds rubbed bright; where the vice was put not on teeth, but their owners, and in place of iron and steel instruments of physical torture, there were foolscap, and parchment, and paper instruments in regular order, which documents were destined sooner or later to bring torture, and horror, and anxiety, and despair, to the minds of hundreds of unfortunate plaintiffs or defendants.

In one word, Mr Scott was a solicitor, and the apartment into which the servant requested Mr Champion to walk, was the worthy gentleman's office.

The banker looked at the carpet on which many a timid client had previously cast his eyes; at the desk, whence numerous savage epistles no doubt had been despatched; at the boxes, —tin, wooden, and iron—containing nothing but law—law and mournful domestic chronicles; at the fire-place, before which many a plan had been discussed, many a struggle resolved upon; at the awfully legal-looking chairs—finally his gaze riveted itself on the handle of the door, and he wondered how often it had been turned by the weary and the broken-hearted, by triumphant men, by despairing women, by orphans whom law had left also beggars, by widows whose all had been taken from them, by the wicked and the good, the victorious and the defeated, the young and the aged. If that very much tarnished piece of brass could have revealed the secret histories of those whose burning or icy hands had grasped it nervously, resolutely, violently, or carelessly—the shelves of any circulating library in the kingdom might have been filled with tales more exciting, because more true, than any which the romancer of former days ever wasted his time in inventing. Soft and fair, hard and horny, tremulous and firm, had been the palms which touched it, gloveless and encased in the softest of Parisian kid; there was scarce a mood of mind, a variety of character, a grade of society, a form of perversity, a development of talent, which had not passed through that doorway, sat in that room, spoken, thought, felt, acted in the now desolate-looking chamber, where Mr Champion remained alone till Mr Scott entered it.

‘You wished to see me, sir?’ said that individual, with a sort of contortion evidently intended for a smile.

‘Yes, on business;’ upon hearing which confirmation of his hopes and the previous message, Mr Scott dropped the outward demonstration of joy, but felt pleasure inwardly, and moving towards his especial seat, which was an extraordinary sort of arm-chair that might for age and ugliness have been in the ark with Noah, took possession of it, and inclined his head towards Mr Champion in a manner which clearly implied the words—‘Now, sir, at your earliest convenience.’

‘I come on business,’ repeated the banker once over again, ‘though not precisely legal business’—the attorney’s face fell a little—‘pray, are you not Mr Zuriel’s solicitor?’

‘Mr Zuriel, of Stor Court?’ inquired the other.

‘Precisely,’ assented Mr Champion.

‘I have that honour,’ said the attorney, and he felt it truly to be one, and a pleasure, and, what was better than all, a profit. ‘I have that honour.’

‘Well, I wish to obtain an immediate interview with him on pressing business, and I want you to gain that interview for me,’ explained the banker.

‘Mr Zuriel is very ill,’ commenced the attorney.

I know that,’ interposed his visitor.

‘Ah! you know that,’ coldly repeated Mr Scott, tapping the desk abstractedly with his fingers; ‘you are acquainted with my respected client?’ This was interrogatively.

‘I never had but one interview with him in my life; but the truth is, I must see him forthwith. I have something to tell him of his grandchild.’

‘He has a grandchild, then!’ said the solicitor, pricking up his ears at the prospect of ‘fresh intelligence.’

‘Were you not aware of that fact?’ inquired the banker.

‘I believe I once heard he had a daughter,’ confessed the attorney.

‘And son-in-law, and grand-daughter,’ continued Mr Champion, with a smile. ‘I am surprised you do not know more about them; for if I am not mistaken, you once transacted a little business for Major Arthur Auguste Delorme.’



‘Never was instructed by an officer of that name in my life,’ responded Mr Scott; ‘but you say it is about a Miss—— I beg your pardon, I did not quite catch——’

‘Miss Dora Delorme,’ supplied Mr Champion, half-amused, half-provoked, by this affectation of ignorance.

‘About Miss Dora Delorme, you wish to speak to my client. Could I be the medium of conveying any message, or letter, for you? Mr Zuriel is very ill: and illness, you know, does not tend to overcome a dislike to general society. I should be very happy to do anything in my power, I am sure.’

‘Thank you,’ said Mr Champion, drily: ‘but,’ he paused—and then added, in a different tone, ‘do you expect to see him soon?’

‘Almost immediately,’ replied the other, imagining a long detail was about to be poured into his legal ears, which he was to convey to the ears, and impress on the understanding, of the millionaire, ‘almost immediately.’

‘Could you tell me exactly when?’ demanded Mr Champion.

‘Well, let me see; I had a letter to-day, and perhaps I may start for Lancashire in the morning.’

‘In which case,’ said the visitor, with great coolness, ‘I shall go with you, and tell you a few particulars on the way. I know you will manage the matter properly for me and Miss Delorme, his nearest relative, you understand, in whom, I have good reason, and so have you, to know, he is interested. Yes, I hope we shall be able to arrange the affair in a satisfactory manner;’ and Mr Champion rose after uttering these words, and left the attorney in a state of mind neither pleasant nor the reverse, but puzzled—a sort of vision of employment by and emolument from the next heir, or heiress, floating dimly through his brain. ‘Perhaps it is just as well,’ he said, ‘though it is not exactly what I intended—better to have something definite arranged, for Mr Zuriel will not be long here—that’s positive;’ and he resolved to get as much as he could out of the banker, on their way down to the West, but when they reached Stor Court he mentally acknowledged he was not a vast deal wiser than he had been on leaving London. People on whom nature has bestowed the knack of attorneyship—nature’s lawyers, in short—and bankers are, I conscientiously

believe, the only individuals on earth who should be permitted to have an hour's uninterrupted conversation with one of those solicitors whose heart and soul are in his profession, whose profession is to him meat, drink, air, and sleep; who has faith in deeds, instruments, conveyances, and title-deeds, and in them alone; who can sound with his wily tongue the depths of a man's history; who can fathom with his eye the purposes of his life; who lives for law and it solely: seeks information to turn it to a legal use; stores up facts, and hints, and confessions; patches all together like the stray pieces, of a child's disjointed map, and, finally, makes a frightfully connected whole out of scraps, which would have been useless in less skilful hands; and who occasionally raises the ghosts of past deeds, chance expressions, careless words, to terrify and intimidate therewith those who vainly imagined all to have been dead and buried and forgotten years previously. Yes, bankers and attorneys may safely be trusted together—like diamond cutting diamond—it comes to nothing in the end, and accordingly, as I have previously intimated, when Messrs Scott and Champion reached Stor Court, each inwardly confessed with a half-angry smile, that the other was quite a match for him; their conversation on the journey down having mightily resembled a series of moves in chess, and the result of the battle being that most unsatisfactory thing—next to a defeat—a 'drawn game.'

For Mr Champion had told little, and learnt nothing of which he was not previously in partial or entire possession; and Mr Scott had not added one iota of importance to his former stock of information; and yet they were very good friends, and felt well enough disposed towards each other as they entered the 'palace' together, and were conducted without delay, or stoppage, or remonstrance of any kind, to the old man's chamber.

Where he—John Zuriel—the owner of that stately pile, the lord of that castle, the once proud, and still almost insufferable master of wood and field, lawn, garden, water, hill and dale, lay dying. Desolate in the midst of his magnificent rooms, the feet of servants only sank down in the rich carpeting; they ministered unto him not for love, but for money; true, disinterested friend never stopped by the gate, nor entered

the mansion, to inquire how it fared with the lonely man; no tender woman hovered like a guardian angel round his couch, bringing him medicine and refreshment gently, as if he were an infant; there was not a really tender hand to wipe the dew from his forehead, to moisten his lips, to smooth his pillow, to soothe his pain. Bitter enough, and desolate enough, the old man had found it to live alone, but more desolate, more agonizing, more awful, he discovered, when too late, it was to die alone.

Not even in peace like an animal, which, shrinking off to some remote secluded cave, or leafy covert, dies in quietness, for he was surrounded by those who did not care for him, to whom living or expiring he was an object of indifference and dislike. With something of the same sensation—only a thousand times stronger and bitterer—as that which oppresses a wanderer sojourning for a season in a strange place, surrounded by the careless, the unattached, the disagreeable, the mercenary, John Zuriel proposed to set forth on that last pilgrimage which knows no return, without uttering a farewell, without bidding adieu to one solitary loving friend; desolate in the midst of luxury and attendants, and all the trappings of wealth, he was just about starting most unwillingly and most fearfully upon the dark brief journey into eternity—alone.

Oh! many a pauper, dying at the back of a ditch, in the poorest, and gayest, and mistiest land under heaven, with his priest holding his crucifix before his eyes, or praying on the turf by his side, his glazed orbs resting first on the outward symbol of the faith, which is his hope, and then on the heavens, to which, he believes, it must conduct him—his head supported by loving arms; scalding tears of affection falling on his forehead one minute, kissed away by trembling lips the next; many a pauper who lays him down to die on the smooth green sward of his lovely island, knows more peace and contentment at his last moments than did the great millionaire on his down bed—the prince amongst converted Jews, the proudest, the richest, the most universally detested man in Lancashire, cross, disagreeable, not good, yet not wholly bad—John Zuriel, of Stor Court.

Because love tends the one, love, and sincere sorrow, and fervent pity; whilst no fond eye, no gentle voice was near the

death-bed of the lonely old man, to break by one sob, one wail of grief, the shock of that inexplicable leap from life to death, from death to everlasting life, which terminates our beings, and explains the wondrous mystery which seems to annihilate, and which yet creates; which the timid and the brave, the enthusiast and the atheist, the good and the bad, the reluctant and the willing, must finally take over the little, but to mortal eyes unfathomable, space separating this world from the next, dividing time from eternity.

Quietly the solicitor and the banker entered that sick chamber, where death, like a sentinel, was keeping dreary watch ere opening the prison-gates and setting the wayward captive spirit free, and both walked straight up to the bed-side and greeted, as men do greet in such moments, the childless, friendless being, whose eye had not yet lost all its savage brightness, whose lip still retained its sardonic sneer, who was still the same as of old, only shattered, aged, broken-hearted.

‘You know me,’ said Mr Champion, drawing a chair close to the couch, ‘and, I see, recollect me too. You remember the errand which last brought me here—it is a somewhat similar one that induces me now to intrude upon you. I come to speak of her and *him*.’

‘Ah! is he dead,’ gasped the old man, ‘dead at last, dead before me—gone first after all.’

‘I do not know about that,’ returned the banker earnestly; ‘when last I heard, he was ill, very ill, and cannot possibly be here long; but it was not that individual I meant. You remember you once asked me concerning another.’

‘Yes,’ acquiesced the dying man.

‘Do you wish to hear more of him?’

Mr Zuriel did not reply, but turned his eyes first wistfully on the face of the man who addressed him, and then more doubtfully on the solicitor.

‘Do you wish me to leave you, sir,’ asked the latter, interpreting the glance aright.

‘If you please, for a moment,’ said Mr Champion. ‘I trust you may be required soon;’ and still thinking of the future heiress, whose friend this banker evidently was, the solicitor retired to the adjoining room, whilst Mr Zuriel nervously demanded,

‘What is it?’

‘When I was here last,’ returned Mr Champion, ‘I thought I was pleading—and pleading in vain, to a man without natural affections, feelings, ideas: it was your whim to assume the character of a misanthrope—and, I confess, you almost completely imposed upon me; but within these three days, I have learnt something which has induced me to alter that opinion—accordingly I am here again.’

‘And speak boldly and fearlessly as ever,’ murmured the dying man, half admiringly, half angrily.

‘More so, I trust,’ answered Mr Champion: ‘for then I did not know the full worth of your grandchild’s character; had not discovered the vulnerable point of yours: now I am aware of both. I hope to speak more boldly, more fearlessly, consequently more successfully, than on the occasion of my previous visit.’

‘You said you had something to tell of her and him. Are they married?’

‘No; but the question you then put to me, whether Mr Lesparde loved your granddaughter, I find I answered erroneously: I have come to correct my mistake.’

‘And she?’ gasped the millionaire.

‘I cannot say much about her; but I see no reason to doubt that she really cares for him: I believe no one could avoid doing so, and she has known him under peculiarly advantageous circumstances. But for her honourable feeling, I should still have been in doubt concerning you. Her repayment of that debt, after years of labour, toil, and anxiety, revealed to me the fact that you had previously sent Mr Lesparde the amount, and then I knew there must be some natural affection lingering in your heart for the child of your child. Dora—’

‘I did not choose,’ said the old man, a flush coming up on the wan cheek, and lighting his eye with the strange, wild gleam of other days: ‘I did not choose, that one connected with me by any tie, should remain under such an obligation to a stranger! And so she too paid it, did she—how?’

Rapidly, clearly, Mr Champion related the whole story of the debt and its liquidation to Mr Zuriel; one circumstance, however, he omitted, and that was the fact of Mr Les-



parde's name having been originally forged to the bill; the omission was intentional and justifiable—justifiable, in so far that it was a secret which did not belong to Mr Champion; intentional, inasmuch as he desired to place Major Delorme's conduct in as mild a light as possible. But the omission made all the difference in the world to him who heard it; as formerly, he believed Mr Lesparde had always felt a sort of affection for the girl, and had served her parent for love of her, it brought back an old wish, that Dora should marry him, change her hated name, and become possessor of his grand palace. He was weak and ill; time pressed; the story was told with fervour and heartfelt eloquence; the character of the man who narrated the history of his grandchild's life, the memory of how all—even Conroy Bradshaw—had praised her, flashed across his mind. It was no trick to induce him to leave his money to a silly girl—none. Lesparde he had made many inquiries concerning; he was well aware how high the banker ranked amongst good men; the strange, quaint little spinster, too, she who had visited him but lately, and pleaded for Dora;—he would repair the past, and gratify himself, make a sort of truce with Heaven, his own conscience, and his dead daughter, ere leaving wealth behind him for ever.

‘Call in Mr Scott.’ The millionaire's obstinacy was conquered—partially conquered, at length, by goodness, virtue, truth, and death; he would do something for her—something after his own fashion, in the manner of his younger self. Call in the solicitor promptly, for the old man would make his last will.’

But no entreaties of Mr Champion could induce him to devise any considerable amount of his worldly goods to Dora unconditionally; he had formed his own especial opinion of the matter, which nothing could shake, which, in fact, the banker speedily discovered it was most undesirable to attempt to shake.

‘He would not have the girl making some absurd romantic love match, as her mother had done,’ he said, ‘flinging away herself and all his money on a fellow like Delorme; no, if she would not marry Lesparde, why Lesparde should have the money; he would make as good use of it as any one else, and if he had any objection to wedding Dora, why Dora might come in as heiress, providing within twelve months she changed



her own detested name for another, the owner to be approved of by his executors, and considered by them a fit and proper person to inherit the lands, houses, and estates, wealth, personal property, and so forth, of John Zuriel, late of Stor Court, in the county of Lancashire, and to become husband to that gentleman's granddaughter, and to assume his name, arms, and position.'

In this manner the will was made accordingly, signed, witnessed, and sealed; and the only bequest left unconditionally to Dora, was the sum of two thousand pounds, to be paid to her after the demise of her father, but not until then.

'Well,' murmured Mr Champion, 'I hope it may turn out happily for all parties; why should she not love Edmund? I think she does.'

And the worthy banker solaced himself by reflecting that if the will were not in all respects such as could have been desired, it was decidedly better than having the entire estate devoted to some absurd crotchet, like the founding of a 'Zuriel's Hospital,' or a set of 'Model Zuriel's Alms Houses,' or the building of market-places, and churches, and a court-house, and a gaol in the small adjacent town, that the millionaire had planned himself, and built, and filled with Zurielites, and navvies, who worked on his railway, which aforementioned town he had christened 'Storville,' because it dwelt, as it were, under the shadow of Stor Court: and although he had some doubts as to whether Mr Lesparde would altogether care to assume the Israelitish name of Zuriel, and quarter his arms with those of the son of an 'old clo'' man, notwithstanding the man's ancestors had been 'captives in Egypt;' still he recollected that a fortune like the millionaire's was not a thing to be lightly refused; and he hoped, and he trusted, and he believed in his heart that Edmund Lesparde and Dora Delorme might yet, in the old man's 'palace,' reign peacefully and happily.

And Death gave the owner of that 'palace' no time to repent him of his late act of tardy generosity, for almost before the ink of that 'instrument,' the last testament of John Zuriel, Esquire, of Stor Court, was dry, he had passed to that other land where wills are not; where those who planned or suggested unrighteous ones, and those who suffered from their

unholy, cruel tenor, will have to give a strict and severe account of how they triumphed, sorrowed, bore; of how they, the designing, triumphed over the innocent and the unsuspecting; of how the latter endured the wrong, and bent their heads to the trial God had permitted to be brought unto them! If the scroll of human life could be unrolled before us now, we should find that unjust or eccentric wills have caused more domestic misery, more dissension, more feuds, more wickedness, more evil feeling, than the ambition of kings, the mismanagement of statesmen, the tyranny of despots. What numbers of lives those documents, hastily, or lightly, or sinfully written and dictated, have blighted; the hearts they have broken; the intellects they have shattered; the ruin they have wrought; the hopes they have destroyed—well, let it pass, for reflections such as these have nothing now to do with the progress of this tale, though much with the happiness of thousands, millions, now dwelling beneath the sun.

John Zuriel had made a not wholly unwise or unrighteous disposition of his property; and passed, without revoking the deed, to that better world where wills, indeed, are not!

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

MR EDMUND LESPARDE lounged about London for several days, grumbling concerning the warmth of the weather, and the heat of the pavement, and the dulness of the season, and the lack of all amusements, yet he could not endure the idea of returning to Orpen, and he had a sort of dim project of proceeding to Paris, although not immediately.

Few of his friends being in town, he began very naturally to consider where those few were, and whilst he was fishing in the depths of his memory to hook up their names and addresses, he discovered in an odd corner of that miscellaneous directory—recollection—the face of a former acquaintance—the Reverend Henry Imlach, who having been curate at Ilpingden during the period when Mr De Lisle was rector of that parish, Mr Lesparde suddenly remembered was a very

agreeable sort of personage, for he had met him at the rectory in those days, and on the continent, and in London during the course of subsequent years, and Edmund wondered why he had forgotten, when at Ilpingden, a very cordial invitation the clergyman had once extended to him, to visit the parsonage whenever he was near it. True, Mr Lesparde had been a mere boy when he first knew the curate, and the latter was now a man verging towards the sere and yellow leaf, whilst the former was still in the very prime and vigour of youth, and health, and life; but what did that matter? he was extremely anxious to see his former acquaintance again: he would go to Ilpingden soon—that very day—and grasp his hand once more.

Not but that, if the truth must be told, he could have contentedly existed without ever obtaining even a very distant view of the rector, and have borne the news of his demise with becoming Christian fortitude, only he chose to delude himself with the shallow excuse, and consequently left his hotel with the intention of putting his project into execution, and driving out to Ilpingden that same afternoon.

And as if fate, approving his design, were resolved to forward it, almost one of the first persons he encountered in the street was Mr Imlach, *in propria personâ*.

‘If you have no better engagement, will you come down and spend a day or two at the Parsonage?’ said the clergyman, after the first greetings were over. ‘I have no inducement to offer save a hearty welcome, and the memory of other times, which were, perhaps, no happier to you than the present. My wife will be glad to see you, I know, for you were a favourite school-fellow of poor Tom’s; do be good-natured for once, and let me drive you out this evening.’

‘I was just planning a visit to you,’ returned Mr Lesparde.

‘Were you? well, that was kind, and you will come then, won’t you?’ and when Edmund promised faithfully that he would, they separated.

The rector sent his servant home by the coach, to inform Mrs Imlach of Mr Lesparde’s intended visit; and in the cool of the evening he and his guest took their seats in the old clerical gig, that had conveyed the clergyman to and from London, for fifteen years previously, and out of which, by these trips, the ‘worth of the original purchase money had

been,' as bargain-hunting ladies say, 'effectually taken two or three times over.'

The horse, which also had a peculiarly proper, demure, vestry look about him, trotted leisurely along roads bordered by orchards and green meadows, and fields in which the yellow corn waved gently in the breeze, as though inviting the reaper to come and garner it in. The wind was soft and mild as it fanned his cheek; the breath of the summer air was pleasant, laden with perfume, odorous with all sweet scents; there was a peaceful home look hanging about the landscape, sleeping in the woods, tinging the sunset clouds with purple, casting lovely lights and shades on the turf, and the flowers, and the fields. Edmund Lesparde felt, as he drew towards Ilpingden, that he had never been so happy before in all his life.

How attentively he appeared to listen to all his companion's details concerning the various alterations that had lately been made, or improvements which had been carried out, in the various districts through which they passed; how little of the conversation he really heard, how fully he was occupied thinking of other subjects.

In all of which Dora somehow contrived to mingle her own sweet face; it was only natural he should reflect a little concerning her when he was approaching the village where she and her father dwelt.

'Ah! here is our own little hamlet,' at length exclaimed the clergyman, apparently as glad to reach it as though he had been away for months a pilgrim in a foreign land. 'Stay; oh! pray excuse me, Mr Lesparde, for one minute, I must stop here to leave a parcel I promised Miss Delorme she should have on my return,' and handing the reins to Edmund, the good man alighted and proceeded towards the cottage, which his companion knew perfectly well, and to which he would, moreover, gladly have carried the little brown paper package himself.

Night was closing; people in-doors were thinking of candles, and people out-of-doors were conscious that objects at twenty yards' distance could not be discerned; and solely because of this fact, Mr Lesparde looked not once up the road before him, nor at the black masses of trees hemming all in, but turned his attention exclusively to the little cottage, at the door of which his friend now gently rapped.

It was like hundreds of other houses in which dwell those, who having saved by dint of toil and industry a small independence, finally retire to spend the remainder of their days in comparative affluence: or, where persons, once blessed with a more abundant share of this world's goods, have crept to waste the prime of life in vain regrets, and to pass the years that still remain to them, ceaselessly and uselessly contrasting the past with the present—what might have been, with what is.

There was nothing about the cottage particularly to interest him, but there was much about those who abode there: why he could not have paid a visit three days before, instead of tormenting himself, and finally deciding that he ought to go and see Mr Imlach, was a question he never put directly to his own heart: therefore it is by no means necessary for me to answer it; only one thing is positive, that when Dora, hearing the sound of Mr Imlach's voice, came out into the hall to speak to him, Mr Lesparde started so suddenly, and gave the reins so desperate a jerk, that the clerical quadruped, taking the same as palpable hints to proceed, moved a step or two forward.

Mr Lesparde pulled him up again, however, and looked intently through the gathering darkness at the open door of the cottage: where, by a light which she held in her hand, Dora, pale and lovely, was fully revealed to sight. How thoughtful she looked as she spoke earnestly for a moment to the clergyman; then all was gloomy and black again to the eyes and the soul of the gazer—for the light had disappeared from view; and the rector, closing the garden-gate, seated himself once more by his friend's side:—

‘That poor girl's father is dying,’ he said—(how communicative people become about their neighbours, in a village) ‘and she is so devoted to him, though he has been nothing but a burden and a tax on her ever since they came here, that the idea of the separation is almost killing her.’

‘Have they resided long in Ilpingden?’ inquired Mr Lesparde, with a wonderful affectation of carelessness and unconcern.

‘Three years,’ answered the clergyman. ‘They were formerly,’ he continued, his mind full of the theme, ‘much better off; and I cannot help thinking when Major Delorme dies, his daughter will know more comfort than she has done of late



years. Time must soothe the first great grief, and then she will not require to teach so incessantly, to provide suitable medical attendance and luxuries for him; and besides, there is a lady, an old friend of mine, residing with them, who has taken a great fancy to Miss Delorme, and whose nephew, I suppose, she will ultimately marry. You must excuse my wearying you with these details, Mr Lesparde, but I am much interested in this young lady; and if you saw her, and knew how devotedly she has attended to her sick father, I am sure you would feel interested too.'

And Mr Lesparde answering, with more truth than his companion supposed, that the details, so far from wearying, interested him, Mr Imlach continued talking concerning Miss Enstridge, and Frederick, and Major and Miss Delorme, till, the servant taking the horse by the head at the parsonage steps, a trim damsel ushered them into the dining-room, where Mrs Imlach greeted them, and where they found a substantial tea awaiting their arrival after a twelve miles' drive.

Mr Lesparde ate little, however, pleading a late dinner as an excuse for want of appetite.

He never revealed his feelings to friend or stranger. Long mixture in and intimate acquaintance with the world had perfected him in the invaluable art of concealing emotions and hiding thoughts; therefore, although inwardly suffering all the pangs which can be inflicted by the 'green-eyed monster,' he joined freely and pleasantly in conversation with his entertainers, talked of former times, of other days, whilst his heart and his feelings too were completely absorbed in considerations of the present.

When he retired to the room prepared for him and found himself at length, to his unutterable relief, alone, he began seriously to examine into his own state of mind, and to ask himself a few questions which he had candour and sense sufficient remaining to answer truthfully.

'Had he sought out Dora Delorme merely to return her the money and to tell her how grieved he was she should have dreamt of repaying it?'

'Yes.'

'If that were the case, why did the mention of Mr Enstridge annoy him so much?'



‘Perhaps there might have been another—a stronger feeling unknown to himself.’

‘Did he, then, in so many plain words, love Dora?’

‘He did not know—he should not in any case like her to marry Mr Enstridge.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because Agatha Durrant had taught him the affections of a true and honest heart were things worth possessing, and he wanted to learn a little more of Dora’s character before he finally determined to remain a bachelor.’

‘Should he like to have that sweet face always near him—did he think an affectionate daughter must make a good wife?’

Decidedly ‘yes’ to both queries.

‘Supposing he grew to like Dora very much, would he marry a girl without a shilling, whose father’s principles were and had been of the very weakest?’

‘Yes he would; he had very nearly married Miss Durrant, who had not a sixpence, and whose whole family, never to speak of herself, had not a particle of principle or truth amongst them.’

Besides, was Dora Delorme answerable for her parent’s faults; and had he not repented him of the evil? for Edmund Lesparde, like the major’s daughter, entertained the belief, spite of Mr Champion’s objections, that it must have been the unfortunate officer who returned the money.

‘What were the nature of his sentiments towards Miss Enstridge’s nephew?’

‘Hatred!’

‘Why?’

‘Because he wished to have no rival in Dora’s affections.’

‘So he really had a secret love for her after all?’

‘Yes;’ and having finally made up his mind on this important point, he went quietly to rest.

Early the next morning he awoke from a troubled dream.

He imagined he had wandered by chance into an old cathedral, where, in a small chapel divided from the rest of the church by a curiously carved screen, he heard familiar voices. He found it impossible to gain admittance but through the carving; he saw Mr Imlach in white robes reading the marriage service, while Dora Delorme and a gentleman whom he

had never before seen, but whom of course he knew by intuition to be Mr Enstridge, stood side by side before the clergyman.

Dora was about to pronounce the irrevocable vows, when Mr Lesparde, in a sort of frenzy, making a desperate effort, forced his way through the screen, and caught the bridegroom by the throat.

Then darkness for a time came over all things, and when he again could distinguish objects he was standing in the chancel of the cathedral beside an open grave, and two coffins were borne slowly up the aisle, while solemn music pealed through the vaulted church, and a hymn for the dead was chanted by voices so low, so sweet, that the strains sounded like the holy whisperings of angels; but as the bearers paused by the grave and laid their sad burdens on the ground, the lids slowly rising, as if by the assistance of some supernatural agency, revealed to view the pale faces of Dora and her father. At this sight a faint sickness came over the gazer, and falling into the grave in agony, the two coffins were lowered upon him, and the earth was being shoveled in, and the stone was about to be replaced on the living and the dead, when with a sudden start, and an exclamation of horror, he awoke.

The sun was shining brightly: he arose, dressed, and then opening the window, looked down into the garden at the back of the parsonage-house, and as he did so dreams of the past, and thoughts of the present, mingled strangely and sadly with the memory of the dream, in which a few minutes previously he had seemed an actor.

The last time he had gazed from that window, happy faces clustered beneath it, glad voices rang through the old garden—and where were they all now—the kind, the true, the unsuspecting, and the frank-hearted? How had he spent his life since then? of what avail had been education and talent to him? to what end or use or object had he devoted himself and his energies, during the intervening years? he had been a boy then, but he was a man now; without a hope, a purpose in existence; was he without a wish too?

No! he had not yet reached that stage of utter callousness, of complete indifference, of careless despair, of intense weariness; he had a wish, and a regret—the former, to see Dora

frequently; the latter, that he had not sought her sooner, before Mr Enstridge became acquainted with her.

Mr Imlach had omitted to describe Frederick to him, wherefore imagination, that arch deceiver and tormentor, embellished him with charms, which, unfortunately for himself, the young man did not possess.

Had Mr Lesparde once actually seen him, he might not subsequently have felt particularly uneasy; but having only heard of him, he was jealous accordingly.

He drew a chair close to the window, and mused about various things, for an hour, then he went down-stairs, and meeting the servant, who had admitted them on the previous evening, asked her at what hour the family usually breakfasted.

‘Half-past nine, sir,’ was the reply, and Mr Lesparde forthwith took his hat, like a man who has made up his mind, once and for ever, and walked in the direction of the Delormes’ cottage.

As he approached it he beheld a wiry-looking lady bustling through the garden, shaking earwigs off the rose-bushes, and energetically setting her little foot upon them—rapidly and correctly he arrived at the conclusion that this individual must be Miss Enstridge, and he slackened his pace for a moment to watch her proceedings. She was an adept in the art of instantaneous killing, ‘she did not like torturing them,’ she said, ‘though they were horrid animals.’

Against beetles, earwigs, and spiders the spinster waged incessant war; every creeping thing which fell in her way was doomed to immediate execution—nay, she went out of her way to kill it. She made searching examinations behind window-shutters, turned up corners of carpets, to seek for her foes; noted spiders depending from the ceilings, and occasionally resolutely took off her bronze slipper and pounded to death therewith any unfortunate insect that might have crawled for refuge under her bed or dressing-table—in brief, wherever Miss Enstridge met with one of those ‘horrid animals,’ as she christened and classified them, instant execution by trampling or grinding to death was their doom.

But on the morning in question the creaking of the garden-gate caused Miss Enstridge to turn so abruptly that a huge black beetle for once eluded her lynx-eyed vigilance. It was

Mr Lesparde who provided this escape for the active creature, which was not slow to avail itself of the chance, whilst the little spinster gazed at the unknown intruder wonderingly, and with no pleasant or friendly eye.

As to Mr Lesparde, he felt he should greatly have preferred inquiring of the servant, whom he had noted as he passed the window, dusting Dora's work-box, if that young lady could be seen, but when Miss Enstridge placed herself directly in his path he felt there was no avoiding her.

He raised his hat; Miss Enstridge condescended a slight inclination.

'Was Miss Delorme engaged?' he asked.

Miss Enstridge 'thought it probable.'

'He was very anxious to see her for a few minutes; it was an unconscionably early hour he was aware, but he would not detain her long.'

The lady looked wistfully, first at the gate, then at Mr Lesparde, as though she would fain have civilly requested him to depart, but there was a something about the intruder which almost in spite of herself compelled her to ask him in, and to say she would see whether Miss Delorme were engaged.

'You may go,' she said to the servant whom Mr Lesparde had previously beheld arranging the room. 'If Miss Delorme cannot see you,' she continued, addressing that gentleman, 'which I think most likely, as she scarcely ever leaves her father's room, is there any message I can give her from you?'

'No, thank you,' he answered, 'I feel extremely grateful for your offer, but as I merely wished to say a few words to her, if she be engaged at present, I will call another time.'

Miss Enstridge without reply of any kind proceeded to search out Dora and communicate the intelligence of an arrival, which she did as follows:

'Dora—ahem! there's a person—a—a gentleman, I believe—in the parlour wanting to speak with you. Nice hour indeed! You had better send down word by Emily that you cannot see him; it is a perfectly ridiculous time for any one to call—why the sun is scarcely up yet; just one quarter past eight!'

Dora did not answer; she grew first very red and then equally white, but after a few moments' consideration she changed her dress, spite of Miss Enstridge's remonstrance that 'cotton was

quite good enough for a person who came before breakfast,' and slowly descended to the apartment where Mr Lesparde awaited her.

For one full half-hour Miss Enstridge impatiently waited for the stranger's departure, but when, at the expiration of that period, she saw him close the garden-gate with an angry and gloomy air, she unceremoniously entered the parlour, where she found Dora weeping bitterly.

'Dora, child, what in the world is the matter?' cried the spinster; and Dora by way of reply sobbed forth, for about the first time in her life, the ready and natural falsehood, 'Nothing.'

'Don't tell fibs,' cried the other sharply. 'Dora Delorme, I don't understand you; I believe you are a most provoking, unintelligible, self-tormenting little fool.' Having delivered herself of which complimentary speech, Miss Enstridge walked angrily out of the room, leaving Dora alone with her tears.

Her friend did not understand her. Little wonder! The girl did not fully comprehend herself; she had refused Mr Lesparde. He had urged, entreated, prayed for an explanation, or a reason, but she would not, or could not, give either. She did not care for any one else, but she would not marry him; she did not say she disliked him, but he could wring no word of affection from her. 'She would not marry!' It was the only definite answer he was able to obtain—why or wherefore, he could not divine; and she would not tell. There was no truth, she said, in the report he had heard concerning Miss Enstridge's nephew—not the slightest; she would be grateful to Mr Lesparde, remember him for ever, but more than friends they could not be; it was impossible; and finally, provoked, confounded, irritated, and wounded, Mr Lesparde abruptly left her, to repent or to rejoice, as best suited her inclinations.

Pride and sensitiveness had been the sole reasons for that refusal; no absence of love—oh, no! but the four years during which she had been a teacher had doubled her pride, increased her sensitiveness, chafed her spirit, mortified her vanity. What am I, she thought, to marry him? a teacher, a beggar, a poor moping creature, who have had to work for years before two hundred pounds could with difficulty be saved. He shall not throw himself away on me; let him think what



he likes, insensible, ungrateful, unfeeling, marry him I will not; it would not be right; I am sure I should have done wrong to accept him.

But the girl's heart was breaking for all that; she felt she had sent him—the one she loved, next to her dying father, best on earth—away from her for ever: in anger he had left her; and from thenceforth, life to her was—nothing!

Because he was rich, and she poor; because she had little, and he much; because she was proud and fastidious as to her own changed position, because perhaps she had too low an appreciation of herself, and, very possibly, an over-exalted one of him, she said 'No!'—when he would have done anything to hear the monosyllable, 'Yes!' and because of a sort of dim glimmering of all these things, Miss Enstridge had tartly, and perhaps truly, called the daughter of her dead friend, and the object of her dearest affections, 'A self-tormenting little fool!'

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

PERHAPS there never was a man of fashion yet, who arrived at that turnstile leading to middle age, thirty-five, could conscientiously lay his hand on his heart, and deny the imputation of having, in his passage through the world, uttered some dozens of that ingenious counterfeit coin, known by the name of white lies, and permitted the same to slide by means of his tongue, from the mint of a ready invention, into general circulation. Like the spirits in Macbeth, there are fibs of all colours—white, black, gray, and so forth; and, like men and women, there are untruths of all kinds—malicious, pleasant, courteous, business, legal, 'good and ill natured, amiable, straightforward, blunt, hypocritical, professional, social, partially excusable, and thoroughly villainous. Under which head would 'white lies' fall? or, are they, as custom makes us occasionally half believe, no lies at all, but merely nice little agreeable elves, who pop words into our mouths just at the right time to relieve us from our embarrassments; to save our friends from pain; to preserve our manners from rudeness; to



afford us pretexts for doing just what we like ; to supply ready reasons for extraordinary proceedings ; and to give us plausible answers to very possibly impertinent questions !

I wonder what kind of a world this would be, if social falsehoods, convenient untruths, fibs of etiquette, conventional deceits, and white lies, were banished off the face of it ! If we all held a meeting to agree to speak out our minds when we spoke at all, and tell more facts than we do and no fictions, I wonder what the result would be !

Whether we should all set to quarrelling forthwith, or whether the necessity for keeping the doors of that apartment, the mind, always open, would induce any better or more Christian arrangement of its contents ; or, whether it would still remain the same as it is ; and if Mrs A. would feel any happier for being told point-blank, that Mrs B. hated her ; and if Mrs C. would like her neighbour much better after being told by Mrs D.'s servant—'My mistress won't see you,' instead of—'She is just gone out, ma'am.'

What a vexed question this same one of fibbing is ; and how hard it is to arrive at rational and correct conclusions concerning it : for instance, Mrs V. does not wish to associate with Mrs T., and instead of candidly and openly saying she thinks that lady beneath her, she writes 'regretting she cannot accept her kind invitation,' adding, perhaps, by way of a softening reason, the plea of a bad headache, or cold, or something which can be easily got up and got over ; and at Mrs V.'s party, Mr R. being asked by that lady's cousin, if she does not sing like an angel, feels himself bound in duty to say 'yes ;' first, because he has been brought up in polite society, and secondly, because he knows if he do not he will never be asked to the house again, and as every one is not similarly constituted, it is one he likes to visit at, though Mrs T. did turn up her nose at the very idea. Well, he says 'yes,' and he does not think it—on the contrary, he is quite sure she has no voice, and sings flat and out of tune and without taste or feeling ; but what is he to do, and what was Mrs T. to do, and what on earth are we all to do, when we do not want to tell the truth, and yet still when we are forced to tell something ?

Take refuge in white lies. Yes ; but then we want a process of reasoning, which may enable us to assure our consciences

that white lies are not equivocations, and that equivocations are not direct untruths, and then not having that at hand, and arriving after mature deliberation at the idea that white lies are, in plain language, falsehoods, and consequently highly reprehensible, we want another line of rails and a fresh train of reasoning to conduct us to another station, where we may be satisfied that society could get on without them ; and finally, at the end of all these journeys, we come back just to the same point whence we started, and seeing both sides of the evil, remain till we grow gray and stupid in a state of mystification concerning not what is right—not what is expedient, but how under the sun we are to drag two opposite poles together, and make summer, on the world thus strangely formed, out of the midst of winter's icebergs. I do not see, I confess, how the thing is to be accomplished, how the most perfect sincerity and the faintest attempt at politeness are to be combined, how the straightforward truth, without shadow of swerving, or mental reservation, or false implication, can be spoken on all occasions without offending, or grieving, or injuring, or angering one's fellows. I do not, in brief, see how, without a total reform of human nature, or a complete *bouleversement* of the present far from perfect state of society, white lies—a very few of them—could be done away with altogether. I wish I could—it really would be a comfort to meet any one who never fibbed, and yet was even decently civil ; who whilst refusing to speak everything but the unvarnished truth, managed to retain a tolerably bearable manner ; who was kind and yet true, forbearing and yet still unflinching ; who always speaking facts, and expressing genuine feelings, and never assigning superficial or unreal reasons, contrived, nevertheless, by some alchemy of the heart, to attach to him one actual friend, who might remain such through life. I have known persons who tried the experiment and were endured—who persevered in it and were scouted—who relinquished it and were laughed at for their endeavour. What, then, are we to do ? dear reader, you may ask as I have often hopelessly done ere now. Really I cannot tell, because being no advocate for any kind of falsehood, I should be sorry to recommend even an enemy to commence the trade ; and yet still as white, and gray, and black—courteous, slanderous, and mercenary, appear to me all members of the one great family,

differing in magnitude and importance, in size, wickedness, and danger, but nevertheless all of the same bad species; I cannot advise any one to lay the flattering unction to his soul, that because, according to the popular theory, 'white' is no colour, white fibs are no fibs at all.

Perhaps the best we, who lack the gift possessed by a few of reconciling apparent impossibilities, can do, is to strive to wander as little from the direct route as possible, to listen more to the voice of truth and less to spurious pretenders, imitating her tones, but deficient in her sterling merits—to try to be more thoroughly sincere than any of us is, and above all not to be deluded into calling things by wrong names, and fancying that because society calls these 'lapses of the tongue' the 'courtesies of life,' they are not very near relatives of those great plumping falsehoods that destroy the happiness of it.

But if, in every day conversation, one hears a deal which is, to say the least of it, 'questionable,' there are some times and places where the plain unvarnished truth may be spoken, where things may be called by their right names, without a dread of being, as Halifax said, 'knocked down as a common enemy;' and therefore as a finale to the foregoing preamble, I may state that when Mr Edmund Lesparde, in declining to avail himself of the Rev. Henry Imlach's pressing invitation to remain for a few days longer at Ilpingden, intimated, by way of excuse, that important business required his presence in London, he asserted or implied (for it is much the same) a fiction which was totally without foundation in fact, for business he had none, neither in London nor anywhere else—he said he had no object in life but to get through it—no business with time but to kill it; and this latter feat one would have thought he could as well have performed in a snug village rectory as in a stupid London hotel—amongst a few he knew as amongst a crowd he did not—amidst the flowers and fields as amidst scorching streets and dusty thoroughfares. He had no business in London, and that was the truth; but then he could not leave the parsonage without assigning some reason for doing so, and if he had assigned the true one, he would either have been laughed at or, what he would have deemed much worse, been pitied, and accordingly finding himself in a

dilemma, on the horns whereof most people have at one time or another been pleasantly stuck, he insinuated, with an amiable smile and a sulky heart, a decided fib to Mr Imlach's clerical understanding, and then considering that he had merely discharged the 'courtesies of life' in a gentlemanlike manner, set out with an untroubled conscience, but a vexed and angry soul, for England's metropolis.

As with arms folded across his chest and brows most ominously contracted, he leaned back in the corner of the coach which conveyed him from Ilpingden to London, and glanced savagely and contemptuously at a most worthy inoffensive old tradesman, who, after vainly attempting to entrap his unsocial companion into a discussion on politics and a conversation concerning the state of commerce and the prospects of the country, had in blank despair taken refuge in snoring, the rejected suitor strove to discover whether Dora's decided 'no' had made him most angry or sorry, and endeavoured to persuade himself that it was a matter about which it was not worth while being either irritated or grieved—that, in brief, sentiment was what he had always maintained it to be, a thorough humbug—that it was all well enough to like women, but that to care for them was a folly—that there was no use in being angry at a girl for pleasing herself, although it was a matter to be sincerely regretted that he had given her the opportunity of displeasing him—that—but why pursue his meditations further? To talk of a man's state of mind after a refusal is scarcely fair, as it would be too much to expect patience from even an angelic nature under such circumstances. The truth was, Edmund Lesparde, spite of his attempted philosophy and real indignation, was greatly out of sorts. This was a style of thing he did not like; for a man who had been successful in all other endeavours to be defeated the moment he entered the lists of love; it was hardly to be endured—for him, the petted darling of society, who had never proposed but to two women, to have been jilted by the one and rejected by the other, was perfectly intolerable.

'The next may marry me, when I give her the chance,' he murmured, with a bitter smile; 'jilt, refuse, or marry—indeed she may.'

And yet there was a strange mixture in his feelings, for as

time rolled on, a sort of sorrow for her, as well as regret for himself, began to take the place of resentment; and then he commenced wondering why she had so pertinaciously declined to give any reason for her decision, and whether she really did care for him—and if so, why on earth could she not have said so, and whether, when she found he was actually gone, she would repent her perverseness; whether it was pride, or if she believed her father would not permit her to marry him; or if she had such unpleasant recollections associated with his face, that she could not endure the idea of looking at it always; or if, in spite of her assertion to the contrary, she was fond of some one else, and that one Mr Enstridge. Ladies, he knew, were privileged to romance a little on affairs of the heart, to gloss over secret attachments; in fact, he believed it was considered more praiseworthy to tell falsehoods than to speak the truth on such subjects; ‘but pshaw!’ he added as he absently feed the coachman, ‘let the custom of society sanction what it will, there is no deceit about her—she is as open as day; I will not do her injustice though she has refused me—for some reason which seemed to her good and sufficient, I doubt not. I wish I knew what it is.’

And in this most forgiving and Christian frame of mind, he entered his hotel, walked leisurely up the stair-case, opened the door of his sitting-room, and started to find Mr Champion in possession of that not extraordinarily magnificent apartment.

‘The very person I was wanting!’ exclaimed the banker, eagerly.

‘Satisfactory for both parties,’ returned Edmund, in a slightly sarcastic tone, for Mr Champion was about the very last individual he desired at that moment to meet; ‘it is not always fate is so accommodating.’

His friend looked at him to find out if possible from his face what had set the wind blowing from such a disagreeable quarter; but failing in this attempt, he returned: ‘I have been watching for you these two hours, though I must say without much hope of your coming; for when the waiter told me you had been away since yesterday evening, I feared your return might be postponed for days. My dear fellow, I have waited most anxiously for you; where have you been?’

‘From home,’ was Edmund’s brief reply.



‘Great information, truly,’ retorted Mr Champion; ‘you are that in London. But,’ he added, ‘I deserved a short answer for an impertinent question; I had no right to ask you where you had been, and I had no wish to pry; it was merely a casual expression of wonderment at your absence, so do not take offence, and I will not either; and now, having disposed of that little affair, sit down there and let me talk to you, for I have much to say that, perhaps, may not prove very agreeable to you to hear, judging by the expression of your countenance at this minute.’

Mr Lesparde knew his friend was ‘sifting him,’ or endeavouring to do so, at all events; he knew it by a sort of forced smile about the banker’s lips, and an anxious benevolent look lying across his eyes, but he was determined not to be trapped into a confession of any kind, good, bad, or indifferent, wherefore throwing off his sulkiness with a desperate effort he answered, as he flung himself on the nearest sofa:

‘Do be good-natured, Champion, and leave a friend’s countenance to its own devices this broiling weather, when there is no shelter where it is, and less where it is going; and if you must talk, let it be in a subdued, unexcited, summer tone, and on subjects which will not require any great mental exertion to comprehend; and do not expect long speeches from me, by way of rejoinders; and do not be offended at short ones—in brief, permit me a little leisure to recruit before this evening, when I take my departure.’

‘Whither?’ demanded the banker, once again infringing on the rules of strict politeness, which have ordained— You, dear reader, know what, and therefore I need not weary you with repeating it. ‘Whither?’

‘To Paris,’ replied Edmund.

‘And why to Paris?’ further inquired Mr Champion.

‘Important business,’ was the answer, at which Mr Lesparde caught himself half-laughing whilst uttering.

‘Nonsense,’ responded the banker; ‘important business is a thing you have no acquaintance with, excepting by name. You have no business in the world.’

‘Very true,’ acquiesced Edmund, ‘and yet still I am here, and it is beyond your philosophy to tell me wherefore. I have never discovered the good of it to this hour.’



You know I did not mean that,' interposed Mr Champion, eagerly, 'you know I did not, Lesparde; what I really intended to imply was, that fortune having placed you in a position which rendered business not a necessity, but a choice; that as you never had chosen or discovered any important employment in life, up to the period when we last parted, I think it most unlikely you have discovered one in Paris during the short interval which has elapsed since then, and therefore you must defer your visit to the French capital for a day or two, because of business I have laid out for you here.—You must not go to Paris to-night.'

'Why?' asked Mr Lesparde.

'Because I want you to go to Ilpingden instead.'

'The deuce you do,' exclaimed Edmund, 'and supposing I beg to be excused?'

'I shall decline to excuse you,' returned Mr Champion, 'for to Ilpingden you must go—willing or unwilling—satisfied or dissatisfied.'

'Must is a strong expression to use to a free-born Englishman,' returned the other, colouring; 'I cannot see the slightest necessity for me to postpone my departure for the Continent—therefore, I will go to Paris, and will not go to Ilpingden.'

'But, my dear fellow,' said Mr Champion most impressively, 'it is quite necessary for you to go to Ilpingden.'

'What to do?' demanded Edmund.

'To have a conversation with Miss Delorme.'

The young man broke into a rather forced laugh at 'the idea,' he remarked, 'of asking a man to postpone a journey to the Continent, for no better purpose than to have a talk on some indefinite subject with a girl.'

'Not on an indefinite subject, Lesparde,' replied the banker; 'on a most important business matter, which I will explain to you if you will drop that disagreeable unsatisfactory manner, and listen patiently unto me for a little—'

'For two hours,' rejoined Edmund, as his friend paused, 'I am your most obedient humble servant, and attentive listener.'

The banker looked annoyed; Mr Lesparde's mood was about the last in which he had desired to find him; he did not know how to commence his explanation; he did not know

how to defer it, because a more convenient opportunity was unlikely to present itself.

‘If you would be serious, Edmund,’ he suggested.

‘Serious—I never was more so in my life,’ replied Mr Lesparde. ‘Now, Champion, do get on, or else leave me alone, don’t keep me on the rack of suspense all day, there’s a good fellow;’ and the younger man adjusted a cushion under his head, and proceeded to make himself comfortable with such a well-assumed air of nonchalance, that the banker felt very much inclined to do what the other was trying to provoke him into doing, namely, leave him alone, and let him go to Paris or Italy, or still further if he choose, without lifting a finger to prevent him.

But then he thought of Dora—pretty Dora Delorme, and for her sake he forgave Edmund—wilful Edmund Lesparde, and so striking boldly to the point at once, he said—

‘The fact is, I want you to go down and ask Miss Delorme to marry you.’

‘To do what?’ cried Edmund, fairly roused, whilst a flush came over his face, which his friend was glad to see there.

‘To marry her,’ he quietly repeated.

‘I shall do no such thing,’ returned the other—‘most grateful, Champion, for the suggestion—best thanks for the hint; but I’d see Miss Delorme—; let me think of some island befitting so fair a princess—yes—at Formosa—before I would go and do anything of the kind.’

‘Why, I thought you liked her?’ remarked the banker.

‘And if I do,’ replied Mr Lesparde, ‘is that any reason why I should make a donkey of myself? I tell you I am not a marrying man: I mean to live, die, and be buried a happy bachelor; to go to Paris to-night, and not to propose for the young lady, your *protégée*.’

There was an air of irritation in Mr Lesparde’s manner, which opened Mr Champion’s eyes as to the actual state of the case; but still wishing to know a little more, he demanded—

‘Do not you think her worthy of you, Edmund?’

‘Worthy of me!’ he echoed—‘she is fifty times too good to throw herself away on such a useless fellow as I am. Please to reach me that cigar-case, as it is close at your elbow. Thank you—worthy of me! you know you think her worthy a much better man.’

‘Than you are, perhaps, but most certainly not than you might be—not than you will be,’ replied the banker, in a kind, frank tone; ‘but now—excuse my cross-questioning—may I enquire why you will not do as I ask you? When I left here, I thought——well, no matter what I thought,’ he added, as he saw Edmund beginning to look angry; ‘only, I want to know now, for many reasons, what prevents Miss Delorme finding favour in your eyes—is it pride?’

‘Pride! what do you mean?’ exclaimed Edmund; ‘no it is not, but what is the use of this long conversation about nothing—suppose we change the subject?’

‘Suppose we continue it!’ said the banker: ‘is it because her father, being tempted, fell? because sorrow and sin came to that cottage amongst the flowers? because a great trial crushed her heart so soon? is it because of these things?’

‘No,’ returned Edmund, doggedly.

‘Is it because she is poor? because she has exerted her talents for a good object? because she fills a lower position in life’s great household than formerly? because her grandfather was a Jew, and rose out of nothing to something? because she has never mixed in fashionable society, and lacks that indescribable something which gives a high-bred polish to the manners certainly, but which very frequently takes the freshness off the heart? is it because—?’

‘No,’ interrupted Edmund, ‘it is not because of a whole host of absurdities; but I do not relish this ridiculous catechising. I repeat I am not a marrying man, and mean to die a bachelor, young or old, as the fates decree, but a bachelor at all events; and if Miss Delorme were a hundred-fold as good, and pretty, and amiable as I admit she is, I would not do what you ask, for all the friends in the universe.’

And, as if he considered this speech a finish of the conversation, Mr Lesparde vacated the sofa, and drawing a chair to the window, flung the casement open, and commenced staring out into the street.

But Mr Champion was not to be so easily disposed of: it was a very simple matter for him to pull a seat also out of its place, and take up a position close to the young man, who grew very red, and seemed to be meditating an escape during the operation; and he would have flown fifteen minutes previously,

only he thought that would prove too conclusively—what? why, what he knew, and we know, and what Mr Champion suspected, viz., that Dora Delorme had been and was much more to him than he cared to confess.

‘Edmund!’ said the banker, ‘will you answer me one question truly? I am not prying into your affairs without a sufficient motive, which I will explain hereafter; it is not curiosity—believe me; I have an object in view when I ask you fairly and candidly—“Do you not love Dora Delorme?”’

‘Love!’ repeated Mr Lesparde; ‘rather a strong expression. Let me see; I like her well enough—that is as far as I can go at present—’

‘To me—’ remarked Mr Champion.

‘Who are my sole questioner,’ said the other in a most provoking tone; ‘you don’t think “like well enough” sufficiently promising to go down and propose on, do you, Champion?’

‘I do not wish to make indiscreet observations, or I should say—’ The banker paused.

‘What?’ demanded the young man.

‘That I do not feel inclined to be quite so angry with you as I did a little while since; that I believe the young lady has been more in fault than you, that—’

‘Will you have the kindness to change the conversation?’ Edmund interrupted, with a flushed face; ‘there are some subjects—’

‘Across which even a friend’s foot has no right of way,’ finished the banker. ‘Admitted—and so I will retrace my steps, with many apologies for the intrusion, and explain to you my reasons for thus annoying you, by telling a short story, which I did not intend to narrate until after your return from Ilpingden this evening.’ Mr Lesparde not condescending any reply to this speech, his friend proceeded as follows:

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

‘You remember the day you and I went to Delorme’s house about that unfortunate bill business—I do not mean the first

day, but the second, when we called to see his daughter, and heard her say what was not strictly true, perhaps, but what she had been driven by some—not very hard to understand—means into uttering. It was an interview neither of us—old men of the world though we both are,’ he added, with a smile, ‘is ever likely to forget; at all events, I confess, brief as it was, it made a deep impression on me, and caused me to take a fancy to Miss Delorme. Something about her—not altogether the beauty of her face, or the strangeness of her position, or the tone of her voice, or the grace of her manner, but just an indescribable something forced me to feel a pity for and interest in one who seemed on the eve of being pushed over such a frightful precipice. I have a fondness for young faces, Edmund, you know, for the sake of the dead, for the love of former times—for young faces, if they be good ones too; and therefore I spoke as I did to you after we left that pretty cottage behind us. I thought I could fully rely on your generosity, and I was not disappointed; that girl’s future was flung into your hands, and you did not betray the trust; you preserved her from misery, and yourself from repentance; spent five hundred pounds to accomplish a good purpose; permitted father and daughter to depart in peace; and so far all was well. They did go—and though I would fain have learned whither and with what plan, yet length of acquaintance could not be urged by me as a sufficient plea for intruding on such sorrow, and therefore for almost a year I remained in ignorance of their whereabouts—I could hear nothing about them.’

‘Mr Champion,’ said Edmund earnestly, as that gentleman paused for an instant, ‘will you once for all let me set you right about that bill business; you have taken up an altogether wrong idea of the matter, and attribute to me a degree of benevolence and disinterestedness of which you might have been capable, of which I was not. It was one of the few opportunities of being useful that has presented itself unto me during my progress through life, and I did not voluntarily avail myself of it. I saw it floating past my very hand, and yet I had to be implored and entreated to seize it; in fact, I only did so at the last moment, when it was almost too late to be of much use—certainly too late to be considered a generous or manly action. Had I not been absolutely shoved forward, and thus compelled



to grasp the prize, it had drifted into eternity, to be a witness against me in that far-off land whither we are journeying. I told you long ago to give credit to whom credit was due, not unto me. Never speak of that transaction again; I blush to think of it. I might have done so much; I permitted myself half-reluctantly to be forced to do so little. Altogether this is a most painful topic to me; can you not select some other?’

‘Not until I have concluded my tale,’ replied the banker with a well-satisfied smile. ‘Like the surgeon who wounds to heal, I am merely probing to cure; and though you do writhe and protest fearfully during the progress of the operation, I am not to be discouraged, but hope to be of service to you yet—let me proceed in peace.’

‘As you please,’ said Edmund, leaning half-resignedly back in his chair; and fortified by this permission his friend proceeded—

‘The sole reason of my alluding to that false step of poor Delorme’s was to explain how it comes to pass that I take so deep an interest in his daughter; if I have a desire in life—a hobby upon which I should delight perpetually to be able to ride—a wish which I strive occasionally to gratify myself by indulging—it is to help young people, to ward off sorrow from young hearts, to retard the tracing of that first memorable line deep grief draws so much too soon across many a brow. It is a foolish fancy for so old a man,’ he added with a mournful smile, ‘but it is one which half reconciles me to the loss of my own child, and makes me find a son or a daughter in every young afflicted being who appeals to my soul for sympathy—but because of that fancy I never forgot that pale, stricken face, and eagerly embraced every opportunity of learning something of its possessor. Conroy Bradshaw was the first who brought me intelligence of her. To get the whole history connectedly out of him, I absolutely asked him to dinner, and endured his society, and listened to countless stories all redounding to the credit of his matchless effrontery, but to nothing else, and he told me much about Miss Delorme, and himself, and Major Delorme, and their situation; and I heard a great deal of falsehood and truth from him, out of which I managed to sift a sufficient quantity of fact to make me feel very sorry for your pretty friend, and to desire to assist her if I



could. So chancing very shortly afterwards to be in Lancashire on business, I paid a special visit to Stor Court—the handsomest gentleman's seat, by the way, I ever saw in my life—for the purpose of pleading his grandchild's cause with that wretched old millionaire, John Zuriel, the owner of what the people in that part of the world call “the Palace.”

‘Well, I thought I had encountered most of the bear tribe during my progress through life; that I had seen almost every specimen of rudeness, pride, and obstinacy, which mankind presents for observation, but such a creature as John Zuriel I never came in contact with. Plead! I might as well have gone down on my knees to one of the blocks of Stonehenge, and apostrophized it! Reason! it was a commodity too valuable to be wasted on him! Human feeling! he said he was and had always been destitute of the emotion! I never held such a conversation with mortal man before; I never met with any living being so perfectly unendurable, so implacable, so inaccessible. I told him point-blank, at length, what I thought of his conduct; but my anger and indignation, in place of exciting him still further, instantly calmed him: in fact, the more plainly I spoke, the more quietly he listened. He took refuge in doggedness, and seemed to mind no more being accused by a total stranger of all sorts of crimes of omission and commission, than if he had been a stump of a tree, instead of a human being. All this time I had been groping in the dark; I had spoken of Dora particularly, of her father generally; entered into no detailed account of the Major's affairs, enlightened him on no point of that unfortunate officer's history; I merely pleaded the grandchild's cause; and when I found there was no use in that, I commenced, just by way of revenge, flinging reproaches at the old man's head; saying all the bitter things I could think of, to try and squeeze some virtue out of him, either by force of love or force of hate. At last I paused, fairly for want of breath, and then he began:—

“You are the first person who ever yet dared to speak what he believed to be the truth to me, since I started in life as a gentleman; and because I respect any one, be he king or peasant, who respects himself sufficiently to say what his tongue finds to say openly before his fellow, I do not feel offended at the rebukes you have thought fit to utter, the

strong language you have used, the views you have been pleased to adopt, and the opinions of my character you have so lately propounded. I have sat here like a target to be fired at, but, unlike the target, I have enjoyed the sport. I have watched how eagerly you took aim, how fearlessly you sent the winged arrow whizzing through the air, how you strove to touch the bull's eye—my heart—and how you missed, solely because your target lacked such an appendage. In return for my patience, ere you depart tell me the truth regarding a certain personage residing in your town, called Mr Edmund Lesparde: I want to know his actual position, his actual income, his actual character, his actual antecedents."

'Positively, Edmund, had a shell exploded at my feet I could not have been more astonished. I did not see my way at all; I was thoroughly confounded.

"“Before speaking fully of any individual to a stranger,” I said, “I must know precisely on what ground I am going. There are circumstances connected with Mr Lesparde which—”

““I know there are,” he interrupted, “and, to speak frankly, that is the very reason I desire further information.”

““Are you acquainted with the gentleman in question?” I asked.

““Not personally, but I have heard of him,” and he looked significantly into my face, whilst I racked my brain for a single clue which might lead me to a right understanding of the old man's meaning.

'All at once it dawned upon me that Bradshaw had not returned straight home from London—that he had spoken of having visited Liverpool—that he had dimly hinted at some mighty secret, in fine—

““That impertinent, meddling scoundrel has forestalled me then!” I burst out, comprehending then the cause of my ill success, the reason of the enemy's fortifications, his walls, his bastions, his impregnability, and as I uttered the words the millionaire broke out into a harsh laugh, and leaning back in his chair, chuckled and sneered, and seemed, in fact, to enjoy the joke vastly. It was the first ebullition of human feeling I had seen about him, and yet still it was more fiendish than human. I was thankful for it, at any rate.

““Had I been aware of his previous visit,” I said, “I

might have spared myself this journey, as I presume he has informed you of all the circumstances I have just detailed."

"All, and more," responded Mr Zuriel; "of his disinterested attachment for Miss Delorme, of the bill business, of Mr Lesparde's kindness, of a whole host of things so trivial and unimportant, that you fancied they were not worth repeating, or perhaps forgot them altogether," and he laughed again; "but now, sir, with regard to Mr Lesparde, what sort of a man is he?"

"What I told him then, Edmund, I am not going to repeat to you now; but judge of my astonishment when, at the end of the recital, he inquired—

"Can you inform me if there be any attachment, any absurdity of that kind betwixt him and my—Major Delorme's daughter?"

Here was the soft spot revealing itself at last; how gladly I would have worked upon it, but that was impossible.

"I feel quite positive not," I said. "Mr Lesparde's affections are engaged in another quarter."

"What quarter?" he asked.

"Excuse me," I began, "but really—"

"Folly," he interposed; "if it be Miss Durrant you refer to, he will either never marry her or prove himself a simpleton if he do. I have heard of her."

"In truth, Edmund, he did seem to have got by some means authentic information on almost every subject, and to cut the conversation a little shorter than it really was, I will hurry on to his latest speech.

"How do you know, sir, this Lesparde never cared for her—that man's child?"

"Rather a difficult question to answer," I said; "one, in fact, which it is beyond me to answer satisfactorily, for I can only say that 'how' I know, I cannot well tell, even whilst I should feel willing almost to make an affidavit that Lesparde never did 'love' the girl, though I make no doubt he admired and felt a friendship for her. They were never together excepting for a few months about the time her mother died, when she was quite a child; their paths have lain in opposite directions ever since—and are more opposite now than ever. I think, under different circumstances, he might have cared for

her, but I feel as sure as I am of my own identity, that he never did do so."

"It is very strange," said the old man, and he looked with a disappointed expression over the lawns and gardens of that beautiful place: "it is very strange indeed!"

He did not tell me what—indeed, he did not seem to be addressing me; so I sat there and watched him, and comprehended how Bradshaw had told just enough to mystify, not sufficient to enlighten him. I fancy, spite of my assurance, he always retained his own opinion on the subject: and from the light he beheld it in, his conclusion was a natural one; but there was no use in my disguising the fact of your want of affection for his grandchild. I believe the opposition to his desire then, has been productive of a great deal of good since; but I must not anticipate. He remained staring so intently out of the window for such a period, that at length, getting tired, I broke the silence with:

"May I again venture, Mr Zuriel, to speak a few words more in your grandchild's behalf? she—"

"I won't hear a syllable about her!" he vehemently exclaimed: "I will never give a shilling to one of the accursed name—let her work, beg, starve. How she exists, or whether, in fact, she exists at all, is a matter of the most supreme indifference to me. I will not give you a sixpence for her, either now or at any future time. Major Delorme and his daughter may die in the poor-house for me."

"I never saw any one who could so speedily work himself up into a passion, and yet so rapidly assume a calm, cold, sardonic manner; he was the strangest being I ever met with. He had been quite quiet the moment before, and there he was again absolutely quivering with rage.

"Am I to regard that answer as a genuine expression of a grandfather's feelings?" I asked.

"Of John Zuriel's feelings, sir," he replied; "who disowns all connection with any other being on earth; all sympathy with human emotions; all desire for mortal kindred. I will not help her now; and, further, if you call until Doomsday, you will still hear the same answer from my lips; if you write till eternity, your letters shall remain unattended to!"

"No great inducement to hold out, certainly, either for

wasting time in calling on, or ink in writing to you," I retorted. "May I not hope, however, that at a future period your determination will undergo some alteration, or, at least, modification?"

"No, sir, you may not," he rejoined.

"In that case," I said, "I shall take the liberty of hoping without your permission; and in the mean time, wish you good morning."

'And, accordingly, I got up to depart, with a stiff, independent bow, which he returned, after an instant's irresolution, by stretching out—a paw I was going to say: but it really was a human hand which grasped mine almost cordially; and the action so emboldened me that I said:

"Mr Zuriel, in spite of all that has passed between us, I leave the cause of your grandchild to be pleaded by your own heart and your own conscience. Your cheerless home, your lonely hearth, your desolate magnificence, all bid you bring her here. Forget the past, or only remember it to draw your daughter's only child closer to your soul. Is Dora Delorme answerable for her mother's disobedience? Ought that mother's disobedience to have separated even her from you, for life?"

'He had dropped my hand as I commenced this speech; and when I paused, glared so fiercely at me, that I assure you, I felt rejoiced, having "said my say," to get at length fairly out of the room, and leave him to digest, not me, but my concluding remarks at his leisure. I did not imagine him to be insane; but I still think, that against Major Delorme he had nursed a hatred for years, that fell little short of madness. He was a morbid, vindictive, obstinate, would-be misanthrope. I do not wish to judge him harshly, particularly as he has now passed to a land where human judgment cannot avail; and I have merely given you so detailed a narrative of the conversation, so minute an account of his manner and expressions, and the ideas I formed of his character, to enable you better to understand what has lately happened.'

Mr Champion paused, as if he wished his auditor to make some comment, but Mr Lesparde turning his head for a moment from the contemplation of an organ-boy, who was grinding away in desperation under the window, merely said—"Pray go on: I am attending to you.'



There was a look in his face the banker did not like, which betokened that anything rather than an easy task lay before him: truth is, he was by no means a skilful diplomatist, most probably because he was one of the most honest and straightforward amongst men. In the long run, it is true, he generally succeeded; because in the great traffic of life, he who trades frankly and fairly, usually triumphs over most obstacles; but still, there are sometimes little corners in the human heart, which require to be cautiously turned; tender spots that will only bear to be delicately touched; insecure ground, upon which the lightest foot dare scarcely rest for a moment; and it was at the wrong side of one of these corners Mr Champion found himself now standing; it was one of those spots he knew he was about to irritate; it was ground of the above description he felt called upon to cross. Well, be it so! incompetent for the affair as he had an uncomfortable sensation of being, still he was convinced it was better to plunge in at once up to the neck, than to stand hesitating on the brink; besides, it was a thing necessary to be done: and accordingly, he proceeded—

‘I returned to Orpen thoroughly disheartened, and the more I heard of the possessor of Stor Court, the more disheartened I grew; sometimes I thought he was altogether destitute of human feeling, then again that he had merely encased himself in armour, within which lay something vulnerable, though how to get at that something fairly puzzled me; and finally, I came to the conclusion that, let it be as it might, his prejudice against Major Delorme was so strong, and his hatred so intense, there would not be the slightest use in making any further efforts in Miss Delorme’s favour, at least during her father’s life-time; so years rolled by, as you know, and nothing worth speaking of occurred in this affair until the morning you sent for me in such desperate haste, to tell me about the return of that five hundred pounds. Then I knew he must have been the sender, and while I asked a few days grace from you, I strove to discover who Mr Zuriel’s London lawyer was, and what manner of man he might be. Thanks to a Lancashire friend, I obtained, after some delay, all the information I required; the description tallied—I had got at the soft spot at last. I thought (do not be angry) I detected a



something in your conversation which gave me hope you might perhaps be induced to travel along a different road from that you had hitherto pursued; and Couroy Bradshaw also, when I went to see him about the Delormes' place of residence, being in a particularly communicative mood, was good enough to—well, perhaps I had better proceed no further, only I determined to be present, if I could, at the interview between you and Miss Delorme, and on the strength of that interview I went that very evening to Mr Scott, Mr Zuriel's lawyer, whom I found starting off to Lancashire to assist his client to settle his affairs in this world before setting forth on his journey into the next. What that will might have been without me, it is useless at present to speculate—whether he would have devised his money to the Earl of Faberleigh, or left it to his country to pay off a little atom of the national debt, or bequeathed it to trustees to squander, or devoted it to accomplish any equally absurd scheme, cannot now be more than surmised. I feel quite sure he would have done something of the kind—he was just in the mood to commit some final extravagance when I went down, but, thank Heaven, I prevented him! I had rather I could have induced him to leave his money to Miss Delorme unconditionally, but that was totally impossible, he took his stand on the ground of her mother's rash marriage, and even when tottering into the very arms of death would not concede an iota to the opinions or representations of any one, and therefore—'

'To condense the matter into a single sentence,' hastily suggested Edmund with a lowering brow.

'He has left all to Miss Delorme providing she marry you; all to you, with the exception of a couple of thousands, supposing she decline; all, again, to her, supposing you are the objecting party, and that she change her name to the satisfaction of the executors within twelve calendar months from the period of his—John Zuriel's, demise.'

Mr Lesparde rose from his seat and commenced pacing up and down the room with hurried strides.

'I had rather, Champion,' he said at length in a husky voice, 'I had rather you had struck me dead than made me a party to such a transaction.'

'My dear fellow, be reasonable,' implored the banker,

‘You have blasted my happiness for life!’ retorted the younger man; ‘cast a stain on my honour; made *her* think me—pshaw! what am I talking about!’

‘I wish you would try to compose yourself,’ said Mr Champion, ‘the matter is surely not so serious a one. I really cannot perceive the use of——’

‘But I can,’ broke in the rejected suitor; and with that the storm fairly burst over Mr Champion’s devoted head: all the indignation which had been pent up in Mr Lesparde’s heart, was now poured forth upon one who was the truest friend he possessed on earth; his disappointment, his mortification, his wounded pride, found vent in one long, bitter, well-nigh unintelligible sentence—the finish of which, however, was clear enough.

‘Tell her,’ he concluded, with a flashing eye, ‘that Edmund Lesparde would not take a princess on compulsion; that he leaves her unfettered as the winds of heaven; that he gives her her freedom as willingly as he keeps his own; that he desires no more wealth than he possesses; and that, by declining to fulfil the matrimonial arrangement of her grandfather’s will, he at once renounces all benefit therefrom and disowns all participation in such a cruel and iniquitous transaction! I leave my character in your hands, Champion, to restore to its former colour—to put right in her eyes—to preserve without stain in the sight of the world. I shall become calmer in time, I have no doubt, but at present, all I can say is, that I will try to forgive you for the false and painful position in which I am placed through you in this unfortunate business.’

And as he ended this peroration, he moved towards the door, but Mr Champion, with a half-smile, detained him, while he remarked:—

‘Of all the unreasonable beings that ever existed, Edmund Lesparde, I think you are the most unreasonable; but, as I consider it rather too bad to be “forgiven,” when I have benefited a man, rather than injured him—promoted his happiness, instead of increasing his misery, I decline to carry any theatrical messages to any one; and insist that, before you start for the Continent, you go and release Miss Delorme, by word of mouth, from the embarrassing position in which *she* is placed. This visit will afford you a fine opportunity for speech-

making, and hanging a sketch of your character before her eyes, in any light your fancy and judgment may best approve of. Forgiveness! I want far more than that—I require obedience and repentance, for I think you have treated me very badly, and that you ought to make some reparation for your conduct, by doing exactly as I desire you.’

‘I will never go to Ilpingden,’ said Edmund sullenly.

‘Well, then, you shall never go to France till you do,’ said Mr Champion; ‘or, at least, till you have seen Miss Delorme. If you prefer it, I will send a special messenger requesting her to come here and favour you with a few minutes’ conversation, as you want to tell her you will not marry her, and are too lazy and too proud to undertake a visit to an heiress.’

‘Mr Champion, I am not in a mood to relish bad jests,’ said Mr Lesparde, angrily.

‘You are in a mood to relish nothing!’ retorted the other—‘not even your own way if you could get it, which you shall not. Sit down there that I may make you listen to right and reason, and bring you back to what it seems to me you have somehow lately lost—your senses. Now, do be rational for once,’ added Mr Champion, pushing him into a chair; and standing sentinel over him, he commenced a merciless cannonade of arguments, which—but it is necessary for us to retrace our steps to Ilpingden: where the result of the worthy banker’s remonstrances can be better explained than is possible at the very conclusion of a chapter.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SILENCE—utter silence in the cottage; not a foot-fall to be heard in that dwelling which was overshadowed by the wings of the dread angel, Death! There was sunshine above and about the house where Major Delorme was sinking rapidly; but in it, was the awful lull that invariably precedes a tempest: the calm of gloomy, foreboding grief!

Where was Dora? In that room where the blinds are closely drawn, where scarce a ray of light finds entrance? she

is in that chamber, watching as of yore, only with a more fixed anxiety, a sterner sorrow, by the side of her father's couch. Oh! what a faithful, devoted nurse she had been unto the wayward, suffering being! What a trial, and yet what a privilege, it is to a woman thus to soothe the bed of pain, the last few days of mortal agony; to be near when the final hour of all approaches. Some seem destined from early youth to the office of tending the sick, cheering the desponding, supporting the weak. I have seen a few of these domestic 'sisters of charity' soothing the restlessness of feverish childhood; keeping the creatures still, amusing them, bearing with them, soothing them: watching the progress of the maladies of later age; ministering to the fainthearted, the weary, the desolate, and the oppressed; who, with no wider field for action than the home circle, or the next friend's house, have yet been hailed in sick chambers, like a fresh breath of the summer wind—a dream of returning health. Are not such God's angels on earth? Will those they have loved, and pitied, and tended here below, not bear humble, thankful record for them in Heaven?

How would men, or women, or children live—how could they endure the ills that flesh is heir to, if it were not for these home nurses, these uncanonized saints? Blessings be on the soft eyes, and the gentle hearts, and the tender tones that have power to make suffering almost sweet, to alleviate pain, to render mental sorrow merely a bond to draw fond hearts closer together. May their path be tranquil on the earth; may grief spare them; may pain pass them by; may age lay only its beautifying, not its withering, hand on their heads; and when Death does knock at their door, may one as loving, as tender, as sympathizing as themselves, be near with them to receive in hope, and trust, and faith, God's appointed visitor; and when the brief struggle is over, may pure angels hover near, to accompany their released spirits to that land which from youth up seemed not to them, nor to those with whom they associated, merely a bright vision, but a blessed reality.

How faithfully for years had Dora watched him whose arm is thrown over the coverlid—his hand locked in hers—he well knew! How she had loved him, both fully comprehended now, when the moment was rapidly arriving that they must

indeed part—not for ever, as Dora prayed and believed, but for a time!

Strange, sad thoughts occupied their minds, as they beheld—the one dimly, the other distinctly—the near approach of that hour, when Death seems the reality, and Life the dream; when the worthlessness of all things earthly is clearly revealed; when the value of things spiritual is fully understood. Perfect stillness reigned in the apartment: for, if the heart and the mind be full, the tongue is generally silent; but ever and anon the dying man convulsively pressed the hand of her who had tended him through illness; clung to him in disgrace; worked for his comfort; never wearied in her love; never faltered in her devotion; never repined at her lot; never admitted to him, by word or deed, that she knew, but for his wanton extravagance, her existence might have been a brighter one; and, occasionally, his dying lips moved, and he turned towards her as if to say something, but always hesitated and stopped before any distinct sound, aught more than a mere murmur, disturbed the silence of that room, where even the ticking of the watch had become a sort of knell—so ceaseless, so solemn, so loud was its tone!

A tap was heard at the door; and when the girl arose and opened it, her old nurse silently handed her a letter; she tore open the seal—read the few words it contained, and then returning to her seat, sat quietly down again, looking, if possible, more sad and mournful than before.

‘What is it, Dora?’ questioned her father, feeling that her hand shook in his.

‘Oh! papa, mamma’s father, Mr Zuriel, you know, has died, and left me two thousand pounds, and—and it has come too late. What do I care for money; what is anything on earth to me now?’ and the poor girl bent her head as she spoke, and broke into a perfect burst of uncontrollable grief.

‘Dora,’ said her father, after a few minutes’ pause, ‘this is a great comfort to me—it takes away some of the bitterness of death. Be calm, my child! for my sake, do be calm: tell me all about it—it is a greater consolation to me than you can imagine!’

There was not much to tell: a few lines from Mr Champion merely stated, that her grandfather was dead, that



two thousand pounds had been bequeathed to Miss Delorme under restrictions—and upon certain conditions, other property also; that he, Mr Champion, hoped to see Miss Delorme almost immediately—perhaps he might reach Ilpingden nearly as soon as his own letter.

‘Kiss me, Dora,’ said the dying man, when the letter had been read to him; ‘my child, I shall now die happy, assured you will not have to struggle with poverty: true, for years I have only been an encumbrance to you, yet I had a certain income, and was a kind of protector, although a very weak one; but now you can never want a friend whilst Miss Enstridge or Mr Champion lives, and that legacy preserves you from dependence. Thank God—thank God for it!’

Dora was weeping so bitterly, that she could not reply; and, for a time, he remained silent, musing on the welcome intelligence: then came a strange sentence—one which sent a wild pang of disappointment to his daughter’s heart. It undeceived her with regard to the past; it destroyed the hope Mr Lesparde had brought to her soul; it showed her the faith she had clung to had been a false one, the restitution *by him* a delusion.

‘If Stor Court be ever possessed by you, dearest,’ he said, ‘you can spare enough out of your wealth to gratify a last wish of mine: repay that money to Mr Lesparde, and say I desired his forgiveness on my death-bed. Dora! the bill was never signed by him—do not let this knowledge turn your heart from me—it was a forgery, but I meant to do no harm at first—my crime was not entirely a deliberate one. I was tempted, and I fell: and then I hated the man whom I had wronged; and palliated the act by thinking he had not dealt kindly or generously by his uncle’s old friend; that he had gained much from me on various occasions, at play, by small bets, by stakes on matches, horses, and so forth. He never gambled as I did: with him, it was a mere pastime; to me, at first, a necessity, then a curse, finally, a moral. I hated him because more fortunate and cautious than I; and so I excused my fault at that time, but lately I have seen things very differently; only it was no use speaking, because, until this day, no means of reparation presented itself. Will you pay him, dear Dora? I know you will, for you are honourable and true.’



The pang was over now; if he had not repaid the money, he had repented; it was sufficient for the girl, who had listened tearfully, earnestly to the above speech, which was spoken at intervals, and with some difficulty: after a moment's reflection, she answered in a low, trembling voice—

‘Papa, dear papa! from the first moment you spoke of this, I felt you had been overcome by the dreadful pressure of circumstances; that—that—in short, Mr Lesparde never signed the paper. Had I been quite convinced his statement was false, I never should have consented to speak a falsehood in a just cause; but when I found the end the affair must have, I determined to go to Mr Lesparde, and by the memory of old times—for the sake of his dead uncle—in pity to you and to me, beseech him to have mercy upon and save us both; at first, he listened reluctantly, but finally consented to meet the bill; and I promised that the amount should be repaid to him in time. He wrote to me very speedily, requesting that we would forget the five hundred pounds was owing; but I could not do this, or accept further assistance from him. And now, dear father, if it be a comfort for you to know it, that sum is repaid to him, principal and interest; and he freely forgives the whole transaction, and can understand the temptation that overcame you.

For an instant, jealousy mastered Major Delorme's better feelings: he had made up his mind to an atonement—worked himself up to an ample confession; he had humbled himself to demand forgiveness, and he found all had been known and accomplished already without his having any consciousness of, or voice in, the matter.

Perhaps his daughter suspected what was passing in his mind, for after a pause, she continued—

‘I cannot feel grateful for this legacy as you do, because I know money to me is now almost useless: had it come sooner—could it have in former years given you the comforts, attendance, change of climate, your health required; if I had known all which could be done had been done, I could have thanked, as you did just now, the Almighty for His great mercy; but still, if it give you one tranquil thought on my account, I rejoice it has arrived even now. One thing it has accomplished, for which I shall be grateful to God through

life: it has induced you to speak to me on a subject on which my lips were sealed. Oh! it has brought comfort to me, to hear the words you have just spoken; say something more to me now—that you are not angry with me for the little part I took in the matter—with me, your own Dora?’

What did he answer? he drew her towards him—he wept and sobbed—he called her his dear, dear, noble child—he prayed for blessings upon her, and finally he whispered, ‘I should like to see Mr Lesparde, my Dora, if it were possible, before I die—write to him and tell him so.’

Miss Enstridge was sitting thinking in the next apartment, when a gentle touch startled her.

‘Will you do something for me,’ asked Dora, and her friend promptly answered, ‘Yes.’

‘Would you take the trouble of sending a few lines to that gentleman,’ laying Mr Lesparde’s address on the table, ‘and tell him my father wishes to have an interview with him.’

Miss Enstridge looked earnestly in Dora’s face, and then said brusquely, ‘Indeed I would not.’

‘Oh! Miss Enstridge, you said you would but just now,’ cried Dora, greatly agitated, ‘you said so—you know you did.’

‘Well, I say now you may just write to him yourself, and deliver your father’s message, and add a postscript on your own business,’ rejoined the spinster tartly. ‘I have no patience with such nonsense, Dora Delorme, you don’t know your own mind for ten minutes together.’

By way of reply to which speech, Dora beginning to sob, Miss Enstridge relented, and remarked in a milder tone, ‘that she could neither understand her nor him;’ and then Dora wept forth that ‘it was indeed, indeed her father and not she who wished to see him—that she was very sorry about it, but dared not say “No” to his dying request, and that write to Mr Lesparde she could not.’

‘Well, well, then I suppose I must,’ exclaimed the spinster. ‘only for mercy sake, Dora, do stop crying; let me, if it were but for the novelty of the spectacle, see your eyes without tears in them. I wish you had any sense, child, and that for once in your life you would show it.’ Having finished which exhortation, Miss Enstridge told Dora to go back to her father’s room and stay there, and instead of writing a note,

she put on her remarkable bonnet and proceeded to the Rectory, where she knew Mr Lesparde had been staying; but the bird being flown, she sat down then and there, and on a sheet of the rector's paper and with one of his sermon-pens traced a series of extraordinary letters, which composed first, short telling little words, and finally a very clear concise epistle to Edmund Lesparde, Esquire; and this missive she despatched to London by the hands of the worthy clergyman's servant-man, who was instructed by his master to use all possible despatch, to which admonition Miss Enstridge added an emphatic—'And, John, don't stop to stare at any of the shop windows till *after* you have seen the gentleman.' Thus whilst Dora imagined the letter was travelling leisurely through the post to Orpen, it was driving in John's breast coat-pocket rapidly to London.

Where Mr Lesparde was not; for very reluctantly, very sullenly, he had started just about three minutes before the arrival of Miss Enstridge's messenger, in company with Mr Champion, for Ilpingden.

'Dora,' said her friend, softly opening the door of the sick-room, 'I want you for a moment; Mr Champion wishes to see you—go down-stairs directly.'

But on the way down, Dora encountered that gentleman proceeding to her father's apartment. 'Please to wait in the parlour till I return,' he said, kindly greeting her, 'I wish to speak first with Major Delorme alone for a moment'—so the girl meekly went into the sitting-room, where she started to find Edmund Lesparde.

'I have come, Miss Delorme,' he began coldly and sternly, 'to prove that in the making of your grandfather's Will I had no part; I shall be the one to decline to carry out his arrangements; which refusal on my part, as you are aware, leaves you sole heiress of Stor Court.'

Twice Dora tried to speak but failed in the attempt; then from her trembling lips dropped the words:

'What do you mean?'

'That I now understand the reason of your rejection; that you thought me a mere mercenary suitor; that you would not accept a husband forced upon you; that you misunderstood me; that I misunderstood you; that I comprehend all now.' He was so angry, so humiliated, so provoked, that he could

not speak connectedly. Dora looked at him in amazement.

‘I do not know what you mean,’ she said at length. ‘What are you speaking of?’

‘Mr Zuriel’s Will,’ he answered vehemently. ‘He, or Mr Champion, or some one (not I, believe me), planned it. I am rich enough, thank God! and even were I penniless, I would take no man’s money on such terms—marry no one on compulsion. Miss Delorme, I refuse to fulfil the conditions; pray consider the estate yours—yourself free as air. God grant you may be happy!’

He was moving towards the door, but Dora detained him with, ‘Will you listen to me? will you tell me—’

‘What do you wish to know?’ he shortly demanded, as she paused.

‘What you mean?’ she said.

‘Why ask further explanation?’ he demanded. ‘You know the wording of your grandfather’s Will; I repeat, you shall be no sufferer by it. Surely I have rendered my meaning perfectly intelligible—the reason of your conduct is now clearly so to me.’

‘I do not know the wording of my grandfather’s Will,’ she said; ‘I never even heard till to-day he was dead.’

‘Do I understand you rightly?’ he exclaimed, ‘that when last we met you had not been informed by some one that but for me you would be sole mistress of Stor Court, and all your grandfather’s wealth; at liberty to marry whom you choose, and confer yourself and all your riches on some more favoured suitor? Did you say you were not aware of this?’

‘I did indeed,’ she answered; ‘I repeat it now. I thought then I was—no matter. I had heard nothing of this Will, nor can I comprehend its meaning yet; if I had—’

‘Well,’ cried Edmund, a wild hope, a sudden joy, causing his heart to bound as he looked at the poor bewildered girl, ‘well, if you had—’

Dora could not answer; a mist gathered before her eyes; she felt sick, dizzy, faint; but as she sank into the nearest chair and buried her face in her hands, she heard a familiar voice exclaiming—

‘Don’t be an idiot, child; can’t you tell him you would have said “Yes” at once?’

Then Mr Lesparde went to hear what Major Delorme's views were on the subject; but ere he did so, Dora implored of him in a low tone not to confess any one had previously returned *that* money. 'I suppose it must have been Mr Zuriel,' she murmured, 'and it would wound my father to hear that he had known of the debt; he was not able to repay it himself, but he repented years since; indeed, indeed he did:' and so the secret was piously kept from the knowledge of the man who had been so much less tender of his own character and reputation than she, his daughter, of his lightest feelings: it were hard to live without such affection; hard and bitter, apparently almost impossible, to leave it all behind.

Half-an-hour afterwards, when Dora, Miss Enstridge, and Mr Imlach, who had come, as was his wont, to see how it fared with the dying man, were summoned to his chamber, they found the shutters open, the blinds up, and a glare of light in the room which almost blinded them, for they had expected to find the apartment as usual in a sort of semi-darkness, gloomier than twilight, yet not quite so black as night.

Mr Lesparde had, at Major Delorme's request, lifted him from his bed, and placed him in an arm-chair near one of the windows; his dressing-gown hung loosely around his wasted figure; his once thick black hair was thin and white; there was a flush in his pallid cheek, but the eyes looked dim and glazed: there could be no mistake—the hour was fast approaching.

'Are you all here?' he feebly asked; 'I cannot see, the room is so very dark. Mr Lesparde, please to open the window—I feel as though suffocating. Surely it is very dark—has the sun set yet?'

'It is just doing so,' Mr Lesparde answered, as he paused for a reply: and Edmund turned his eyes to the western glory of purple, and crimson, and gold, amid which the sun was sinking to rest—turned his eyes towards the western heavens, and whilst he did so a dim wonder stole through his mind, as he considered all he, that dying man, who now was nothing more than his fellows, would comprehend ere that same sun rose again.

'Where is Mr Imlach?' inquired Major Delorme; 'you have been very kind to me,' he continued, when the clergyman



replied, 'you have comforted me in my last illness, and taught me the sure and certain hope there is even for one like me; but it is of Dora, my own dear child, I now want to speak. Dora, where are you?'

The poor, sobbing girl knelt close beside his chair; he laid his white, death-like hand on her head, and then resumed:

'Mr Lesparde has asked Dora for his wife; with confidence I place her happiness in his hands. We have been long at variance; I have done him wrong; but she has mediated between us, and there is nothing now in either of our minds but friendship. You have forgiven all,' he added, turning towards him, 'for the sake of my child. Miss Enstridge, I know you love Dora, will you watch over her till she is married, and be a friend to her always? Mr Champion has been the means of bringing wealth to her, and peace and joy to me. My daughter will never forget all she owes to him, all the comfort he has given me, all the misery he has saved us from!'

There was a pause then. In a broken voice, he said: 'Mr Lesparde knows all my other wishes; and now, Dora, my child, my support, my life, God bless, guard, and keep you!'

He let his head drop heavily on his hand, which rested amongst her rich hair as he murmured the last words.

Dora remained quiet for a minute or two, but then, with a sudden cry, put her arms around his neck, and raising the weary head, looked into his face.

He was dead! There was only a corpse where so late a man had been!

\* \* \* \* \*

After the snow had lain on the ground; after the birds had built their nests, the cuckoo returned to his southern home; when the hay was cut and stacked, and the trees were once more laden with fruit, and the corn again ready for the sickle, Dora Delorme and Edmund Lesparde became man and wife.

Some relations of the latter, Miss Enstridge, and Mr Imlach alone composed the group around the communion rails; together with Mr Champion, who most willingly gave the bride away. Little Jenny Nicholls kept Mr Frederick Enstridge company in a pew commanding a view of the scene, until that young gentleman's feelings overcoming him, he was obliged to leave the church, much to his aunt's indignation, who told him



he was a 'crying baby : ' notwithstanding which remark, her own face, during the ceremony, was puckered up to an alarming extent.

'Did I not say truly,' she remarked to Dora, when, the breakfast concluded, the bride went upstairs to change her dress, 'did I not say truly that just when I was comfortably settled down in this Ilpingden place, you would be marrying and so dislodge me again ?'

Dora in reply laid her face lovingly against that of her dear, true, tried friend, and whispered, 'Only dislodging you from Ilpingden ; you are to come, you know, to Stor Court, and never, never leave it, nor me.' Whereupon Miss Enstridge, kissing the girl vehemently and energetically, retreated to her own room, and there cried till her cheeks and her eyes were scarcely distinguishable from each other.

Mightily incensed were the great folks of Ilpingden at the quiet marriage ; at being overlooked by the now wealthy Dora Delorme. There was not a word in the English language sufficiently powerful to express their feelings of indignation, and some of the best educated consequently felt themselves constrained to take refuge in French.

And oh the gossip there was concerning the newly-married pair ! One told how Major Delorme had wasted his patrimony (he had but little to waste, as the reader knows) ; how he had made Dora labour for him ; how Mr Lesparde, having heard she was entitled to a large fortune, proposed for her whilst she was in ignorance of the fact, and insisted that she should perform her promise afterwards. Then another person had a different version of the matter, that it was an old love story, the smooth course of which Major Delorme had ruffled ; whilst a third and a fourth severally declared Mr Zuriel was deluded into making an absurd Will, and that Dora merely wedded Mr Lesparde from mercenary motives, and to keep the money of her family in her family.

In brief, Mr Lesparde was stigmatized by one person as a fortune-hunter, whilst another declared he was fifty times too good for that cold-hearted, cunning creature, Dora Delorme ; and in all the circumstantial tales which were passed, like 'current coin of the realm,' from mouth to mouth, and received with greater avidity than would have been the case with more

sterling metal—there was just such a smattering of garbled truth as sufficed to lead unprejudiced people astray ; but Dora and her husband were independent of the chatter of Ilpingden—for the once poor teacher had left it and the village behind her, as the fairy stories have it, ‘ for ever and a day.’

Lady Traffles still astonishes the Ilpingden folks with her devotion. Sir Peter Tomkins for years was as pompous and disagreeable as ever, but before he sank into the grave had the unutterable satisfaction of bestowing the fair hands of two of his fat daughters on city knights, to the full as purse-proud, egotistical, and utterly vulgar as himself.

A new rector preaches every Sunday in the old gray church, which stands quiet, tranquil, and solitary amongst the grassy graves and uneven tombstones. People say that Jenny Nicholls and he are about to be married, and if there be any ‘ fact ’ in the story—for the truth or falsehood of which, however, I am not responsible—her good aunt will not have to leave the old rectory-house, which since its first building, above a century ago, has indeed been frequently ‘ gladdened by birth and sanctified by death.’

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## CONCLUSION.

IN the north-western portion of old hard-working England lies to this day a large tract of country untraversed as yet by a railway ; in lieu of which a coach and four, not, indeed, the coach and four of our ancestors, though still a refreshing and picturesque object, conveys passengers from the nearest terminus to any one of the small villages they may desire to visit, which are scattered at irregular intervals throughout the district.

At a very short distance from the largest of these, and situate in an extensive park, stands a handsome mansion, almost concealed from public view by those lordly aristocrats of nature’s creation—noble trees.

It is so ancient and beautiful a property, and the traces of a master’s frequent presence and superior taste are so unmis-

takeably stamped upon it, that as a matter of course the outside passenger, if a stranger, always demands of the coachman—

‘Whose place is that on the right?’ to which the other invariably responds—

‘It belongs to Mr Lesparde Zuriel, *our* “member,”’ in a tone which clearly indicates that in his heart he believes there is not another constituency in England which can boast such a representative.

Now it usually happens that few of the passengers know aught of this Mr Zuriel, or feel any extraordinary desire to enter his abode; but if you, kind reader, have journeyed with any degree of interest by my side heretofore, you will entertain no objection to alight at the park-gate, and come on to see how time has treated two old acquaintances.

For the place is called Stor Court, and is the same which years and years ago the millionaire purchased and decorated: wherein dwelt John Zuriel, the proudest and the wealthiest man in Lancashire, which some people sneeringly, and others reverently, called ‘Zuriel’s Palace;’ where his meek wife suffered, sickened, died; whence he banished his only child with a blighting malediction; where the tidings of her untimely death darkly entering remained as spectres for evermore; spectres of anger, grief, and misery, to the heart of a desolate old man, who only relenting at the last hour, died and left treasure untold to a girl he had never seen, but who with her husband came and dwelt there! Happily?

Come and see the group assembled in one of the pleasant rooms on the evening of a warm day in the ‘golden summer time,’ and judge for yourself.

The windows of that apartment open to the ground; they look over spreading lawns, where the long trailing branches of the beech, fir, and chestnut sweep the grass and cast dark shadows over it; the white leaves of the myrtle flower, as the wind stirs the foliage of the plant, fall, covering the earth with a starry perishable carpet, and filling the air with a sweet refreshing perfume.

From the casement, at the flowers, the lawns, the trees, a fair face looks forth; it belongs unto her who was Dora Delorme, but who is Dora Lesparde Zuriel; beautiful still, for even time, feeling affection for the gentle-hearted woman,

has only laid a light and loving hand upon her head, and smiled kindly in her pale face as he passed. People rail at the 'grim old monster,' as they term him, yet he always deals tenderly with the meek and patient of spirit, unless disease or some never-dying, ever-oppressing mental suffering follows in his steps. A little shade, a dim shadow from the darkness of the past, rests on Dora's brow in the present, and most probably will rest there till it is cold and rigid in death; for there are some sorrows which brand their impress so indelibly on the heart that no after enjoyment, or comfort, or lapse of years, has power to efface the ineffaceable mark from the tablets of memory—whence no circumstance is capable of complete obliteration.

Oh! how fair and white they remain in the keeping of a fortunate few—how scored and blotted with the weary chronicles of an eventful though rarely happy life they speedily become in the hands of others; what a limited number of occurrences only some would desire to erase from their leaves—how many, to wash out even one sentence from the sad history, would weep over the record tears of blood till the latest moment of existence.

The page of Dora's experience had been neither all bright nor all dark: the web of her life had been mixed with some black threads, chequered, with a tracery of sorrow—there was much of pain, much of pleasure, in her memory of the past—enough of the former to temper and chasten her enjoyment of the present; sufficient of the latter not to permit the former to cloud with more than a subdued light its brilliancy.

And now, perchance, you ask if that individual with the strongly-marked features, gray whiskers, and much bald head, can possibly be the lively, handsome, careless Mr Lesparde of former days; and when I answer that he is, you feel sorrow at the change, and half-angry with me for having led you on to see it; but surely this is most unjust, for older we cannot grow and yet remain precisely the same as we were wont to be. If you live, dear reader, years will alter you too, and yet after the lapse of fifteen or twenty summers friends will more cordially clasp your hand and greet you with fonder affection, and a greater feeling of warmth and pleasure, than is the case at present; for now fifty friends, or at least acquaintances,

meet them at every turn—then the good will have died and departed—many must have formed new ties and forgotten the memories of old—then, in short, you perhaps may seem the only link remaining of an old and once long bright chain, binding the flowery sunny days of imaginative youth to the dreary struggling years of practical energetic manhood.

Like our thoughts and our efforts, our loves and our friendships concentrate and become stronger as we grow older—less liable to be affected by the breath of absence, caprice, or change, than at the first wayward sudden start in life. As a full compensation for the many attachments of that early period, if age loves fewer persons than youth, it loves those few more—at least, in most instances. Dora knows it is so with her, for such a number of years she has been getting fonder and prouder of her husband every day, that I am sure she can never now love him any better, and he by way of return would not exchange his dear, good, gentle, beautiful wife for the handsomest duchess ever presented at court.

Dora — experience, circumstances, have taught him his mission: not to fritter life away in ‘killing’ time, but to turn valiantly on the enemy, and make each moment prove a benefit and a blessing to his fellow-creatures.

His two large estates, ‘The Oaks’ and Stor Court, are as well managed as any in England; and in Lancashire, which contains the bulk of his property, he is so respected and idolized that, when the Honourable Theophilus Turton, nominee and nephew of the Marquis of Wigsley, came down, with twenty thousand pounds, and fair promises, to buy and delude the honest and independent and enlightened electors, they rose as one man, and shouting ‘Lesparde, Lesparde-Zuriel for ever!’ sent an honest man into Parliament, to record the sentiments and advance the interests of incorruptible voters.

Three children occupy the mother’s attention, share the mother’s love. The eldest is a boy; and Dora, as she parts his hair on his forehead, declares he is the image of his father, and earnestly murmurs a wish that he may also be as good—a wish in which, as he is the heir of Stor Court, all tenants on that estate heartily join. Master Arthur, the second, having a strongly developed taste for tin guns, small cannons, and other such warlike weapons, in addition to a remarkable love for the



smell of gunpowder, is to be, so his father affirms, a soldier, much to Dora's sorrow, who being haunted by a fear that some twenty years hence he might in that case have to become a target for some hostile nation to shoot at, would greatly prefer his entering the Church; but, when she gently asked the boy—'Should you not like to be a clergyman, Arthur?' he says: 'No, indeed, I should not, mamma. I am to be an officer, when I am a man,' in so decided a tone, that poor Dora's heart swells and at the same time dies within her, for admiration of his spirit and dread whither it may carry him; and, in truth, she is very proud of him, and the handsome, daring child is exceedingly proud of himself, and longs to grow up, that he may become a modern edition of the Black Prince.

And a little girl, called Frances Selina Dora, whose destiny is not revealed unto the mother's eye; though a stranger might fear the roses on her cheek are too bright, and the light of her eye too brilliant, to last long in this world, is the darling and delight of all hearts. Dora could not tell which of the three she loves the best, nor concerning whom she feels the most anxious; her husband, however, says he likes the girl the best, 'because she is sometimes quiet, and is, besides, the only one;' but there may be another reason for this preference to be found in the fact, that Edmund, the possessor of wealth untold, of landed property, a cherished guest at all the houses in the neighbourhood, never looks in his youngest child's face without a strange, lingering, half-sad, half-regretful memory of that time when he, a very young man, first drove his present wife, then a little girl weeping for the loss of her mother, over to 'The Oaks'—and—tried to console her.

Everybody likes those children; even Miss Enstridge, who seems as though through centuries she would remain unchanged, declares, 'Dora has a way of making the children endurable, which is a mystery unto her: but then, my dear,' she frequently adds with a smile, 'I never professed completely to understand you.'

Love is the means of accomplishing this great end; love, and truth, and gentleness, for Dora and her husband believe these to be all powerful; and Miss Enstridge, when in a particularly good frank temper, affirms, 'that Edmund and Arthur are the only two boys she ever heard of (always excepting



her brother and nephew), who do not seem born with an irresistible, insurmountable propensity for torturing animals, and domineering over their inferiors in wealth and station.'

One day Mr Frederick Enstridge came humbly to tell his aunt he was going to be married; whereupon she replying, 'Let me see her,' the intended bride was speedily introduced to the old lady, who, after surveying her from head to foot, condescended to kiss her; and told Frederick privately, she would do very well, though not half so nice as the wife *she* should have preferred for him.

And the worthy lady portioned all her brother's daughters, and gave so much to her nephew, on his wedding day, that finally nothing was left excepting a small amount, which she sunk in a life annuity, to have, as she said, 'done with it;' and though she occasionally goes to see Frederick (whose law never came to anything), her house, her home, is always Stor Court; through which she follows Dora like her shadow, loving, trusting her dear 'child,' even more than in the days when she was but a teacher.

'Dora, dear child,' said she one day as they stood together in the room where Mrs Zuriel had put the ring on her finger years, long years before, 'Dora, dear child, there was once a skeleton here; and not long since either there dwelt an awful one in the breast of the old man, who made *her* wretched and you at length happy. I saw both skeletons—they gave me a sort of loathing to the place, it seemed so mournful spite of its stately magnificence, but, thank God, there is scarcely a shadow in it now, and whenever I hear any dealer in old saws asserting 'there is a skeleton in every house,' I shall point triumphantly to Stor Court and say, 'I know a home without even the vestige of one in it.'

And Miss Enstridge was right, for if ever peace dwelt in a household on earth, it abode in that one over which Dora was mistress, whereof Edmund, her husband, was master; and why more happiness should not dwell in more households I do not know, unless it be that the heads of very few are as kind and good, as simple in heart and honest of purpose, as the possessors of that handsome habitation—Stor Court.

If people would only live together in harmony, how pleasant an abiding-place even this world might be—only to think

what a dark dungeon hatred, and resentment, and obstinacy, and evil unforgiving passions made the old man's 'Palace' in the reign of its first king—only to consider what a sort of little heaven it became when his successors took possession of it, bringing such a host of good kind feelings, benevolent intentions, Christian purposes, in their train, that the spectres of old fled appalled across the threshold at their approach, and never entered the lofty apartments again.

And there when his appointed time came Mr Champion, the kind-hearted banker of Orpen, died. By an open window in the long library he sat quietly one summer's evening, looking at the trees and inhaling the perfume of all sweet flowers—at length he closed his eyes, and Dora, thinking he had fallen asleep, never for a long time tried to arouse him, but when at length she did, found he slept the slumber of death. With a smile on his lips, without sigh or struggle, the true philanthropist, the meek Christian, the mild reprover, the steady friend, white-haired, went peacefully home to God!

But oh! what tears rained over him; how Dora felt she had loved him as, kneeling beside the corpse, she raised her streaming eyes to her husband's troubled face and said, 'Dear Edmund, let us be thankful, for we have another friend in heaven.'

So he died—so he was mourned over, as one 'not lost but gone before;' and humbly, and meekly, and earnestly Dora and her husband strive to copy his example, and become possessed of his abundant charity—in them 'his works live after him;' and in lowly cottages, and in stately yet not happy homes, tenanted by the poor and the needy, the rich and the miserable, wherever their feet have trod, wherever their voices have been heard, there is love and respect for and trust in the man who once was little better than a mere butterfly of fashion, and the sweet lady he married, the great heiress, the patient governess, Selina's daughter, Miss Enstridge's favourite, Mr Champion's friend, her father's comfort—beautiful Dora Delorme, known better through half the Shire as the Member's wife—John Zuriel's grandchild.

THE END.



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